

Hugo Award Nominee

ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

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Wave

By Harlan Ellison



DAVE MORSE ©

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Anomaly

By Patricia Anthony

Art by J. Wallace Jones

They were playing catch, not with a flashby, but with a beach ball that had an afterthoughtish look. I decided it had probably been borrowed from Pediatrics. Rarely do such parents come prepared. When parents come empty-handed, as I imagined these had, they are frightened by the empty silences that fester between them and their children. That's when they look for props.

The ball was a cheap, plastic thing with longitudes of primary colors and poles of red. A small, happy planet for small, simple people.

The father was doing fast sprints, feinting to his right and then to his left. Sometimes he tossed the ball overhead, sometimes underarm, but always athletically. His smile was fixed and determined, a glued-on smile.

Four yards from the father the son stood, a fat post, catching the ball only if it came directly into his hands. Otherwise he would let it go past him and then amble, not jog, after. The boy's face was utterly somber, more an expression for schoolwork than for games.

The mother sat in her long, white dress as if she were attending a social day at the races. It was a family painting by Hieronymous Bosch. Only the boy seemed sane.

The father's smile failed, becoming the grin of a man who was weary of pumping gladness into a leaking container. He tossed the ball to the boy's right, just far enough that his son would have to jump to catch it. The boy didn't. He stood, his sorrowful eyes following the ball's bright path. After it had stopped, he trudged towards it, picked it up, walked back to his prescribed place and took up the game again.

The father's frown came on with the menace of a spring squall. With a snap he flung the ball hard into his son's moon face.

The boy never put up his hands to ward it away. He never ducked. The ball hit with a smack that I imagined I could hear even through the double-paned windows.

And time paused.

The three became statues of themselves. Rage and hot blood drained from the father's face. The mother hesitated, her iced-tea glass half way to her perfect lips. His hand to his nose, the boy stood, stunned. In gay bounces, the ball dribbled away across the jade green lawn.

Then time resumed. The boy turned to follow the

rolling ball. Reaching it, he picked it up carefully. He walked back to his spot, crooked his awkward elbows and tossed the ball in a gentle, high rounded arc back into his father's hands as if nothing of importance had happened.

*** * * * *

"Did you enjoy the visit?" I asked the boy.

He glanced up, his neck craning. Tall and stooped, I towered over the boy like a recombinant vulture.

The boy's eyes fell. "Sure."

"We need to talk about it. How you feel about your father. How you feel about your mother. It's important if you ever want to get well."

"I don't know them well enough to feel anything," he said.

There is a residual effect from the Thanapeline, an odd one that makes the boy seem like an adult. When he died the last time, he'd been fifty-three years old.

"Can we have some ice cream now?" he asked.

And then, sometimes, he acts like ten.

*** * * * *

"That's him?" Carleton asked as he looked through the one-way glass.

I nodded. Bobby was intent on a game of War. His thumbs pressed manically and with an exacting rhythm on the pads. The speaker was open, and I could hear the BEEP-BEEP as he scored. Average juvenile hand-eye coordination. In a moment, the game won, he put the unit down. Average juvenile attention span. He looked over at us and I imagined he could see me. I wondered what he was thinking. Not much, apparently. He began to pick his nose.

Carleton glanced away. "As far as I'm concerned, the eating disorder's caused by the parents. The father is disappointed in his son, his son sees it, the son overeats."

"It's not just overeating," I told him. "He ravishes his food. Sometimes he puts so much into his mouth that he can't chew. When he eats we have to station someone in the room with him who knows the Heimlich Maneuver. In the two months he's been in the hospital, he's choked twelve times."

Carleton shrugged. "Food's always been symbolic of love. Ask any fat man."

I put my palms to the glass. It was cold and hard and insensitive. Bobby was listlessly picking through

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EDITOR'S NOTES

By Charles C. Ryan

For Art's Sake

As you know from reading and viewing *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, we think science fiction and SF art are important.

But all publishers don't treat SF writers and artists with the same respect that we do.

We constantly hear tales of woe emanating from New York — the home of "me-too" marketing. The place that too often tries to imitate the success of others.

Unfortunately, the corporate mentality has gained a disturbing hold on the publishing industry — which is why a few months after a best-seller like *Shogun* appears you suddenly see books labeled "in the tradition of *Shogun*." The little literary science-fiction ghetto we are fond of has increasingly begun to reflect this same corporate marketing mentality, particularly as SF becomes more popular and lucrative.

We now have "in the world of" publishing, in which relatively new writers are contracted to write a story in a world already created by a big-name SF author. Thus, the publishers aren't actually selling the story of a contracted writer, but are marketing the well-known author's big name. Some of this stuff may actually be good, but the approach isn't encouraging.

Once upon a time, publishing was relatively simple. An author would write a book and send it off to publishers. An editor would buy and publish the book if it was good. The book would then sell according to how readers agreed with the editor's taste. This, of course, entailed risk. Most books never earned back their advance payment to the author, some did well, making a modest profit, and

some became best-sellers, paying for all those that sold poorly.

Today, too many publishers — advised by their accountant's perception of the bottom line — concentrate more on trying to ride the current trend in publishing, whether it's macrobiotic food books or novels "in the tradition of (fill in your own title)."

Publishers commission "scientific" studies, polls and surveys to gauge the public taste and determine which covers sell best and what people want to read.

To capitalize on these trends, editors and publishers increasingly assign story concepts to contract writers and say give us "a book like (fill in the name)" and make sure it has plenty of X, Y and Z in it. (X, Y and Z can be sex, violence, romance, humor, dinosaurs, asteroids hitting the earth, space pirates, or whatever is "hot" at the moment.)

And while publishers are busily trying to catch the latest trend, and telling their editors to do the same, freelance writers often find puzzling rejections of good work. Such as: "This is good, but it doesn't fit any of our categories — meaning corporate marketing scheme."

In other words, if it isn't a romance, horror, cyberpunk or unicorn fantasy, they don't want it — and sometimes tell writers to "write us one of those."

This is how things improve? This is creativity?

Paint by numbers

These studies, by which New York attempts to quantify and identify what the public wants in

what is essentially an art form, affect the artwork you see as well.

Art directors are told by the marketing department and accountants that "this kind of cover sells because it's yellow and has sex in the upper left hand corner and an elf on the right." These judgments are based on some "study result."

Instead of giving the assigned artist the novel to read, art directors often send a page saying "illustrate this scene" and then go on to set more criteria.

In some cases, I have been told, artists are even ordered to ignore the actual description of the character in favor of one that will (presumably) sell better.

I was recently asked, off the record, why a certain prominent artist did a paperback book cover that had nothing to do with the story inside. The answer, plain and simple, is that that artist probably never had a chance to read the book and, as often happens, might even have painted the art for a completely different book. Only the art director thought it would "fit (read market) better" on another novel.

Paperback covers are small to start with, so imagine how an artist feels when he or she is told "you can only use the lower left-hand corner."

Artists cope because professionals learn to produce what is required. But do they do their best possible art under such circumstances? Forced into such artistic handcuffs, is it even possible to get inspired?

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A Message From Our Alien Publisher

Red or Gray?



A spokesperson for the automobile manufacturing firm known as General Motors recently announced that garnet red and metallic gray are the most preferred colors among car buyers. Human beings believe that this choice is the most important question to be answered in choosing a vehicle — which is why General Motors carefully studied the question.

Thus you begin to understand the dialectic of human existence. To the human being, the difference between garnet red and metallic gray is as substantive as the difference between Miller and Bud, which is to say it speaks to the very essence of the human experience.

I am not saying garnet red is more meaningful than metallic gray or that metallic gray is more consequential than garnet red. Only a human being can do that, because he is schooled in such choices from the time he acquires consciousness. He makes such choices constantly, in all walks of life. *Time* or *Newsweek*? Buick or Oldsmobile? Coke or Pepsi? Visa or Mastercard? American League or National League? PS/2 or Macintosh? Don Johnson or Rick Springfield? Particles or waves?

While on our planet a fundamental question always resolves into the pentalectic, on earth the human being has only two choices to make in confronting a philosophical proposition. I know that sounds like a poverty-stricken experience, but it has its compensations. It means the choice is quickly made, for one thing, and it can mean lifelong commitment for the human be-

ing. Where we are haunted all our lives by the four alternatives we didn't choose, the human being rarely doubts. To the extent he ever thinks again about the unchosen alternative, he regards it as unspeakable.

Think how simple life becomes! Two choices for every metaphysical question! A lifetime commitment! A 50-50 chance of getting it right!

With only two choices, of course, entropy plays an important part, and eventually it must eliminate any distinction between them. The alternatives inevitably begin to resemble each other. The human being, however, responds to this by strengthening his commitment and his loyalty.

Bud and Miller have coexisted for so long, for example, that they are virtually identical in appearance, ingredients, taste, price, and their long-term effects on the user. But a partisan of Bud would rather undergo torture than join in a celebration of Miller Time. And a follower of Genuine Draft would drink hemlock before agreeing this Bud was for him.

The difference between the two is regarded as being as significant as the difference between transubstantiation and consubstantiation. But I won't go into that difference. You would never begin to comprehend it. I do, however, expect a civil war in a major North American country during the next ten years to decide the contest between Miller and Bud.

For any fundamental question, each of the two choices has its own sacred icons — Spuds McKenzie, the New Generation, Microchannel Architecture —

which have no meaning outside the sacred precincts of conversion. Indeed, they have no meaning at all.

The most ardent proponent of the PS/2 would be unable to explain to you the meaning of the Microchannel. But he knows it is something worth dying for. Like all icons, these serve as rallying points and concentrators of faith.

In our studies of humanity, we cannot afford to ignore the dialectic as the essence of the human experience. Human beings have fought wars over questions that you would consider unimportant. But with human beings, as the question becomes less meaningful, the struggle over it becomes more bloody. In the sixteenth century, the human population of a place called Europe wasted the lifeblood of a generation over a dispute about whether it was more virtuous to believe well or behave well. I could cite many such examples, but I know they would sicken you.

You will understand the precariousness of human existence when I report here that lately the two great modern camps of human cultural experience, the Soviets and the Americans, have begun to resemble each other. The two still differentiate themselves by their beliefs regarding the ownership of the means of production. But that distinction is very amusing in a world where ownership has nothing to do with control. As we

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Hammer 80

Unfit to Print

By Robert A. Metzger

Art by Larry Blamire

Ting!

The chrome bell was tarnished green, and it left a greasy smudge in the palm of my hand.

A moth-eaten curtain behind the counter shuddered, as a gold- and jewel-covered hand grabbed a fistful of the fabric. With a quick tug that kicked up a cloud of dust, the curtain was pulled aside.

I smiled. Experience had taught me that first impressions are doubly important when dealing with the psychotic.

A man stepped out from around the edge of the curtain, returned my smile, and walked forward. He was dressed in a sequined white leather jumpsuit that was unzipped down to his rhinestone belt buckle. His hair was shoe-polish black, and styled and puffed to the extent that it gave him at least another four inches in height. Hair included, he might have just cleared five feet. He sported lamb chop sideburns, and his unzipped jumpsuit revealed several pounds of gold chain that dangled over his pot belly. At least three of his lower teeth were missing. Embroidered into his leather collar, with ruby-red sequins, was the number nine.

Without a doubt, he was the saddest excuse for an Elvis Presley impersonator that I'd ever seen, and in my line of work I'd seen far too many.

I shoved out my hand. "I'm Dirk Hutchings from the *Global Enquirer*," I said, "here to see Elvis Thirteen."

Reaching up, he grabbed my hand and pumped. "I'm Elvis Nine," he said into an apparently dead microphone that he held in his other hand, "and I'm so glad you could be here tonight." He smiled and, letting go of my hand, pulled a grimy towel out from beneath the counter, and used it to wipe his forehead of what I could only guess was imaginary sweat. "Have a seat, and we'll get this little show on the road." He pointed behind me, gave a half twirl that sent his gold chains swirling, then disappeared behind the curtain.

Walking over to where he had pointed, I dropped into an orange vinyl chair. As I sat down, a ragged piece of the chair's plastic upholstery bit me in the ass.

God, I loved this job.

Glancing around, I was delighted to see that all-too-familiar Rag on the three-legged coffee table next to my chair. There was no mistaking the Day-Glo cover of the *Global Enquirer*. It cost a buck a copy, and we sold nearly 15 million issues a week at the

supermarket checkout line. In the last five years, the Rag had gone from a throwaway in Santa Monica to distribution in 27 countries.

I was the Rag's Science Writer. Naturally, my beat didn't cover Diet, Astrology, or UFOs. Those big three each had their own specialized staffs, and filled the entire fourth and fifth floors of the downtown office. I handled the science pieces that fell between the cracks. In the last issue I'd contributed *25 Miracle Uses of Garlic*, *Bigfoot Love Nest Uncovered in Missoula, Montana*, and *Nicaraguans Training Spider Monkeys as King Kong Killers*. It had been one hell of a good week.

However, this week had been looking piss poor. I was a day away from deadline, and all I had was 100 words about a flock of all-white-meat turkeys from Modesto. I was feeling the pressure, and had already cranked out a little creative nonfiction about ESP Ninjas infiltrating American electronics firms when the phone rang. The psycho on the other end wouldn't give out many details, but he claimed to represent a group of Elvis Presley impersonators that was going to destroy the world by converting every man, woman, child, dog, cockroach, and tumbleweed into diamonds.

It was a front-page-caliber lead.

I was damned lucky that the call was even put through to me. Leads on Elvis impersonators normally went to the Dead Rock and Rollers desk, and anything that even hinted at the end of the world went direct to Reverend Lazlo in the Religion and Possessed Major Home Appliance Section. The gods were definitely smiling down on me. With address in hand, it had been a 30-minute shot by 'Vette, from downtown LA to the San Fernando Valley, and then into the warehouse district of Van Nuys.

"Welcome back for the second show!"

I looked up. Elvis Nine had returned, microphone in hand and towel draped over his shoulder.

"Elvis Thirteen and all the gang are ready for you in the Main Room," he said. "It's show time!"

I stood. If this story turned out only half as good as it was looking, I'd be in Tahiti next week, blistering my skin under a tropical sun, sucking on drinks that came with little paper umbrellas, and interviewing the locals about rumors of killer-mutant sponges spawned from French H-bomb blasts.

Life is good.

*** * * * *

"It is both a privilege and honor to have Dirk Hutchings of the *Global Enquirer* present at the official announcement of the destruction of planet Earth," said Elvis Thirteen to his associates. He was standing and speaking into his dead microphone. On his collar the number thirteen gleamed in red sequins. If this guy lost his black horn-rimmed glasses, he might have actually looked just a touch like Elvis.

Fourteen of us sat in red velvet chairs that surrounded a white marble table in an otherwise empty, barn-like room. If you had stopped at the corner of Fifth and Figueroa at around two in the morning on a Thursday and kidnaped the first thirteen derelicts to wander by, you would have gotten a group that more closely resembled Elvis Presley than this bunch did. They all wore similar sequined white-leather jumpsuits, all appropriately numbered, and each and every one of them dripped with gold chains and jeweled rings. They all had the same styled black hair and lamb-chop sideburns. All of them. Even the six women. Even the Chinese guy who must have weighed 500 pounds, and took up two chairs. Even the midget who sat on a stack of telephone books. Even the blind black guy wearing sunglasses. And even the woman puffing on the stub of a cigar and taking quick swigs from a brown paper bag. And of course, they all clutched microphones.

I would have killed for a group photograph. This was front page stuff.

Elvis Thirteen, who sat opposite me, pointed to the midget Elvis at my left, who was seated on the stack of telephone books. "Elvis Three has a press kit that we hope you will find helpful," he said.

Elvis Three pushed a three-ring binder, covered in black velvet, over to me. I flipped it open, and the first page was an eight-by-ten glossy group shot of all thirteen of them seated around this table. I quickly rifled through the binder. It was filled with at least 50 single-spaced typed pages, and a half dozen more photos. I stopped at one page which was titled: *Invaders' Diet — Be Slim and Trim for the Apocalypse*.

I gently closed the binder and, reaching into my coat pocket, switched on my recorder. This was the story of a lifetime. I could ride this one all the way to a corner office in the penthouse suites.

Elvis Thirteen sat back in his chair. "The press kit is quite complete," he said, "but I'm sure that a reporter of your caliber would like to ask a few questions."

"Thank you," I said. I leaned back in my chair, getting comfortable. "From our brief phone conversation, and what I saw while flipping through your press kit, am I correct in assuming that you are in fact aliens?" I managed not to smile.

"Of course," said Elvis Thirteen.

Good. He hadn't hesitated in the slightest. I appreciated a psycho who was up front.

"Am I to further assume," I continued, "that everyone from your planet is an Elvis Presley impersonator?"

"I'd like to pass that question over to Elvis Two, who is the group's nanomolecular biologist," he said.

Elvis Two was a scrawny, anorectic-looking woman with the type of pink, shriveled skin that you

got from soaking too long in a hot tub. Bringing her microphone up to her mouth, she smiled, exposing large, yellow buck teeth.

"An excellent question, sweet thing," she said with a nasal twang. "If you'd turn to page twenty-seven of your press kit, there's a photo of what we actually look like." She batted her eyelids at me.

Flipping through the binder, I came to page twenty-seven. It was a blurred shot of what looked like a pile of lime Jell-O covered with spaghetti.

"I hope this picture is sufficiently out of focus," she said. "I know your magazine goes to great pains to titillate the reader when it comes to photos of aliens." She ran a hand across her flat chest. "These forms that you see us in are simply constructs that we remotely control." Her snake-like tongue darted out and licked her chapped lips.

I'd have to keep my distance from this one.

"Why take on the form of Elvis Presley?" I asked.

Elvis Eleven leapt out of his seat. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Hutchings," he said, and snapped off a quick salute with his microphone. "I'm the team's exopsychologist, responsible for costuming." He looked around the table as if expecting applause from his fellow wackos, but they sat unmoving. Elvis Eleven appeared undaunted by the cool response. "After a detailed study of your species' system of values, it was obvious that a standard Earth-destroying alien wouldn't stand a chance of getting any decent press. If we played it legit, our message would be buried right below the bit on seventeen uses of yogurt."

I squirmed slightly. The yogurt bit had been my story.

"After further analysis of your fine magazine," continued Elvis Eleven, "it was apparent that the most coverage went to entertainers, especially those who died under mysterious circumstances and continue to make metaphysical reappearances. Elvis Presley became our obvious choice." He then sat down.

"Thank you," I said. "That certainly makes sense to me." Rule number one when interviewing nut cases is to always agree with them. *Feed the fantasy* is my motto. "So could you give me a synopsis of exactly what this message is about?"

The massive Chinaman, Elvis Four, slowly stood. "I represent exo-legal," he said solemnly into his microphone.

He did not smile, but possessed that sneer favored by the type of lawyer who wouldn't offer you his business card unless he smelled a 60-percent take on a minimum hundred grand settlement. This reassured me somewhat. It's nice to know that lawyers throughout the galaxy share the same compassionate standards as those of their Earth-bound associates.

"We are ethical beings," said Elvis Four.

Hell, I had no problem with that. I wasn't about to argue with a 500-pound Chinaman dressed up as Elvis Presley who thought he was a lawyer from Alpha Centauri. Even brain dead, I wouldn't have been that stupid.

I nodded. I smiled.

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Wave

By Harlan Ellison

History, we are told, is written by the victors. That's probably why the Snake gets such bad press in the Bible. By extension, then, it might also be truly said that *literary* history is written by the survivors.

Those of us who bore arms in that obscure genre war of the '60s known as the New Wave in Science Fiction, who are still very much alive and writing, carry the battle ribbons and the scars — the former called Hugos and Nebulas, the latter called revisionist commentaries — but we have survived and, in most cases, have prevailed.

And so the time comes slouching back from Bethlehem for one of the survivors to write a little history. PFC Ellison reporting, sir. It was hell out there.

I recently wrote a long essay (panegyric, actually) for *Playboy* on the joys, merits, legacies and enrichments of the Sixties. Whole lotta '60s-bashing going on these days, mostly by ex-fellow-traveler-kneejerk-liberals who knew which side of their bread was buttered by civil disobedience and civil rights and civil concerns, when such humanitarian matters were the topics of the day ... and who sneakily trickled-down to Conservatism and kneebending (as opposed to jerking) at Reagan's altar, when it became clear that the source of the butter had passed back into the hands of The Old Boys' Network.

In my essay I pointed out that the upheavals of the '60s seemed

the products of an aberrant period in American history, until you took a look at the '50s from which those years proceeded. Revolution, disgust with duplicity, questioning of Authority, the rise of the feminist movement, the assumption of their own destiny by blacks ... all of that was in direct response to the uptight, sexually-constricted, conformist *modus operandi* of the Fifties, with its advocacy of businessman rapacity, its coddling of multi-national corporations, its naked greed and materialism. The me-first attitude. The blindered belief in the Manifest Destiny of John Wayne's *macho* America, that we had never lost a war because God (or Whoever was in charge) was on Our Side and we could, thus, do no wrong.

The Sixties blew all that apart. We existed in a corrupt, bigoted, sexist, wasteful, self-destructive Dreamtime; and the Sixties' sense of social conscience came in like a *scirocco* and blew across the cultural landscape leaving in its wake a litter of wrecked racism and twisted ethical turpitude. And from that debacle rose a fragile sense that we are all part of a great chain of life, and there is more to living the examined life than the size of one's stereo speakers and filling the hours of primetime with tawdry goods intended merely to sell McDonald's toadburgers. (It only lasted for about ten years, that fragile humanism, and while we were busy getting back our breath and licking our wounds, in came Falwell and Reagan, Ivan Boesky and Watt, Robertson and Meese, *Risky Business* and Rambo, Donald Trump and Bret Easton Ellis. And we find ourselves back in the '50s, except now we're far more tarnished,

weary and filled with anhedonia. But that's another essay, for yet another time.)

I detail the social setting of the '60s and point out that it was birthed by the attitudes of the '50s, because that is exactly the parallel needed to be drawn for understanding how the New Wave in Science Fiction was birthed by the restrictive literary milieu that preceded it.

An important element of the discussion, that the literary revisionists carefully ignore. Maybe by chance, maybe on purpose. "So are they all, all honourable men..."

What it was, this "new wave," was a great many different writers simply getting pissed-off at about the same time. Not just among sf writers in America, but in France, in England, in Australia, and even in Japan. It all seemed to happen at once, but in fact, it began with J.G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock and Brian Aldiss and a gaggle of other Brits, who started raising hell in a magazine called *New Worlds*, soon after Moorcock assumed its editorship in 1964.

Oh, the goodies Mike shoehorned into every issue! To die! Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron*, Disch's *Camp Concentration*, Zoline's *The Heat Death of the Universe*, Lang Jones's *The Eye of the Lens*, and Sladek and D.M. Thomas and Barry Bayley, and Mike Harrison's *Running Down*, and all the Jerry Cornelius knockouts by Moorcock and even (he added, with no humility whatever, but a need to be included in that august company) my own *A Boy and His Dog*.

And if you notice that there are a bunch of Yanks in among the Celts, Picts, Angles, Saxons and Normans, it's because *New*

Worlds was the place to be in those years. It was published on a shoestring with an Arts Council grant, and it seemed to keep to a publication schedule devised by Bateman's arch-enemy, The Joker. For months, no *New Worlds* would surface; and then two issues would suddenly pop out of a hat; the first with, say, the beginning of Brian Aldiss's *An Age* and a Zelazny short story, an excerpt from Brunner's *Stand On Zanzibar*, and something odd by Gene Wolfe; and the second an "all new writers issue" that numbered among its contributors Robert Holdstock, M. John Harrison, Chris Locksley, and Graham Charnock. *New Worlds* was the venue for one's most innovative work, in those days; and so there were a great many Americans who showed up in those pages.

Why?

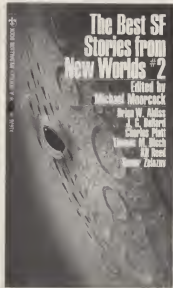
Because we were strangling. It was that simple. We didn't know it, didn't really understand it, until we began to see what Moorcock was trying to do. And then we understood that we'd been inarticulately railing against the restrictions in the science fiction form, that we'd been hampered and hammered and hamstrung, and we were frustrated by it all. That we wanted to *break out*!

(For a *much* better, *much* longer chrono-history of *New Worlds* — and for a proper understanding of this important watershed publication — lay hands on the Fontana paperback edition of *New Worlds: An Anthology*, edited by Michael Moorcock (1983).)

But there was no place to "break out" into. American magazines that published science fiction in the early '60s had been slow to build on the breakouts in style and content pioneered by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* and by those in *Galaxy* in the 1950s. (An aside: H.L. Gold was the masthead editor of *Galaxy* in those opening years, and he has certainly received an abundance of proper praise for his influential — if eccentric — ramrodding of the

genre in the pages of that important monthly. But what is seldom mentioned is that a significant intelligence was at work behind the scenes, laboring mightily along with Gold. That intelligence was Frederik Pohl, who was responsible for helping to eschew the "technocratic" domination of sf that had obtained through the '30s and '40s. Largely unsung till recently, Pohl's contributions were enormous and)

By the mid-Sixties, Pohl was editing *Galaxy* and *If*, ably assisted by Judy-Lynn Benjamin



"... *New Worlds* was the place to be ..."

(later, Judy-Lynn del Rey), and though he publicly gave short shrift to this "New Wave" idea, he was, in fact, publishing considerable experimental fiction that has since been accepted as seminal work in the canon. But that was from 1965 on.

By 1965, an entirely new crop of writers had emerged in the field, their roots more deeply sunk in literature than in the physical sciences that had dominated, as subject matter, the youthful genre of *scientifiction* since the 1920s; and many of those academy-oriented writers railed against the restrictions imposed on them by tunnel-visioned editors (one of whom openly admitted that his maga-

zines were edited with an eye toward the mothers of young kids who might audit what their children were reading) and by fanzine-based "critics" who loathed any movement off the dead-center of commercial sf that had existed since Gernsback's *Amazing* in 1926.

Because science fiction was considered a bastard child of the Mainstream Literary World, published almost as an afterthought by the major hardcover houses, seldom reviewed seriously or with dignity by the *Atlantic* or *New York Times* — which invariably shoehorned the infrequent reviews of Asimov or Clarke or Heinlein into ghettos titled "Spaceman's Realm" — and never to be found in the annual O. Henry award volumes or Best American Short Stories collections, the tone of the work being done was in large measure dictated by the approbation of fans, who discoursed endlessly in fan-magazines over that season's repetitions of the preceding season's favorite (as in loved or hated) imitations of what had been written in all the seasons preceding. The editors paid a great deal of attention to what the fans wrote and what the fans told them at conventions. And if an occasional breakthrough, like Philip Jose Farmer's "The Lovers" in *Startling Stories* in 1952, became a *cause celebre*, it was treated as an unholy aberration, and ten years later was still something of a scandal because it had actually dared to use miscegenation with an alien as the core of the plot. (An aside: in the first hardcover edition of *The Lovers* in 1979, twenty-seven years after its first appearance in *Startling Stories*, and eighteen years after its initial release as a Ballantine paperback, Phil Farmer expanded and updated the novel, and the dedication of that hardcover edition encapsulates the point I'm trying to make here. The dedication is to the editor of *Startling* who was pelted by the shitrain and hellfire of fannish opprobrium for having published such a "depraved, sick, twisted piece of illiterate filth" — an actual quote from a fanzine of

the period. The dedication reads: "To Sam Mines, who saw deeper than the others.") Even in the mid-Sixties, what the fans wanted, and what the guaranteed core readership of fans approved, was the rigor laid on even the most successful sf authors.

Because of that rigor, writers were ghettoized, and an astonishing number of talented men (and a few women) were pressured imperceptibly but endlessly into rewriting what they had done many times before. Writers who had it in them to expand their talents and the genre rewrote and rewrote the same tired yarns. And many of them went to their graves never having realized their potential.

The mainstream would not have us, the academy had not yet discovered us, and the fan mentality influenced what was usually permissible in terms of style or content. It was, as it had been since the 1920s, a ghetto, a subcategory of literature whose aficionados — despite the popularity of giant ant movies and an occasional Arthur C. Clarke page 3 review in the *New York Times* — still hid their copies of sf magazines inside the *National Geographic* when they read them on the bus on the way to work in the morning.

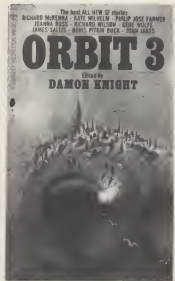
And that was the situation. Now it is history, albeit minor literary history. Then, at that time, it was all we thought about, all we talked about, all we decried. For young (in talent and intellect, if not years) writers, it was an ongoing anguish. Thus, almost simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic, a revolution was born.

It seems, almost a quarter of a century later, using words like "ghetto" and "revolution," as hincity and unfashionable, as melodramatic and amusingly embarrassing, as overhearing creaky Wobblers playing chess in Washington Square reminiscing about the paranoid Palmer Raids of 1920. How strange it seems, to be recounting HISTORY when it was merely the workaday activities of writers trying to speak in true voices. As distant and incunabular as the Dead Sea Scrolls

to an arrogant, chilly, tv-bred, MTV-sparked, flat affect generation of young people for whom "nostalgia" is breakfast.

But here is how I viewed it in a quotation from 1966:

"As with all work that either approaches or becomes Art, there is a specific and enormous demand on the observer, by the very nature and dimensions of the work itself, to commit; to participate; to bring something individual and personal to the work; in effect, to expand it, to add to it, to enlarge it. To color and intensify it; to personalize it, if you will. It is this superimposed de-



"... the first 'New Wave' ripple."

mand that is birthed in the serious, often experimental, always passionate intent of the work by its creator, that we seek to convey to the reader."

Looking back on those words, I recognize our individual need to give as much as we could. To give more than had ever been asked of us as fantasists. To bring the audience along with us, to places we'd only dreamed of creating. To soar!

And so, without knowing or even suspecting that our hunger to write better than we'd ever written before would begin a "movement," we were drawn in-

to a literary war. With virtually no contact among the progenitors, on at least four disparate fronts, the war was begun:

•Damon Knight — who had been one of the very few outstanding critics the field had produced till that time, a magazine editor of uncommon good taste and imagination, and a noted fictioneer — began his long series of *Orbit* original anthologies in 1966 (though the actual editorial work was done in 1965, making *Orbit*, chronologically, the first "New Wave" ripple).

•Moorcock began work on the revamped *New Worlds*, the first issue appearing in July of 1967. But, as I've noted earlier, mere gossip, the transatlantic word-of-mouth about the magazine, was already having an impact over here.

•A well-known critic and anthologist of the time, Judith Merril, in her August 1966 book review column in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, went a long way toward codifying the parameters of this infant uprising, and in that column the phrase "New Wave" was used for the first time in relation to what was being brought forth. Actually, that's popular myth: she never used those words in that column.

(An aside: the term "speculative fiction," while not entirely satisfactory as a referent catch-phrase for a genre that encompassed Edgar Rice Burroughs and J.R.R. Tolkien at one end, and Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Pynchon at the other, was much preferred at that time by professionals in the field over the outmoded and insufficient *science fiction* — at best a marketing designation for lazy journalists, booksellers, sales reps and publishers — or the egregiously imbecile neologism *sci-fi* which was becoming common coin in the tabloid press, much to the dismay of those struggling toward mainstream acceptance of more sophisticated work in the form. It was a term first coined by the late Robert Heinlein in 1939. "New Wave" proceeded from Francoise

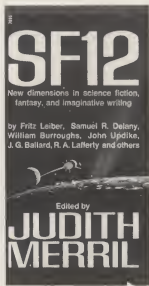
Giroud's *nouvelle vague*, a term introduced in *Cahiers Du Cinema* in the early '50s to describe a group of younger, influential French film directors. Judith Merril later popularized the term as regarded the new work being done and, in his "New Glossary for Science Fiction Critics," Gary K. Wolfe of Roosevelt University commented: "... writers associated with the New Wave have been credited with introducing new narrative strategies into science fiction images as metaphor, and with weakening the boundaries that had long separated science fiction from Mainstream Fiction." And so, the term was Velcro'd on us.)

•Merril, in her final best-of-the-year anthology (*SF 12*, 1968), virtually filled the book with "New Wave" material — as she interpreted the sub-genre — to the near-exclusion of all other, traditional forms of science fiction.

•As for myself, and my part in the "New Wave" imbroglia, it began in 1965, when I embarked on the trilogy of original anthologies known as the *Dangerous Visions* books. As Moorcock's *New Worlds* functioned as an open forum for new directions and experimental writing in England, *Dangerous Visions* served a similar purpose here in America. Writers flocked to the book on invitation to write those stories the marketplace had told them were unpublishable. To write the most "dangerous" stories they'd ever wanted to set down. The profound effect on the field that *Dangerous Visions* had in 1967, followed by *Again, Dangerous Visions* in 1972, is not something I need to recount here. They are the all-time bestselling original sf anthologies — perhaps the most popular sf anthologies of any kind if sales figures and being constantly in print since first publications are a yardstick — and despite the inordinate delay in my finalizing *The Last Dangerous Visions* (and the meannesspirited attempts to sabotage it by the likes of Christopher Priest, a man whose work was rejected for the third volume,

thus making his "objective criticism" more than slightly suspect), I am convinced that when *TLDV* finally appears, it will live up to the myths that have preceded its publication.

(An aside: In Santa Barbara, California, there is an antiquarian bookdealer who does business under the name Joseph the Provider. Excellent bookfinding service, and publisher of an elegant catalogue. One of many such on-site and mail-order bibliophiles who deal in rare books. As I was writing this essay, Joseph the Provider's 35th catalogue, bearing the cover



"... filled the book with 'New Wave' ..."

legend *Modern First Editions and Literature*, crossed my desk. I said I wouldn't go on at length about *Dangerous Visions* and its effect on the field, but I cannot resist reproducing here an entry from this typical antiquarian book catalogue, appearing immediately after an offering of uncorrected proofs from T.S. Eliot's *Collected Poems: 1909-1962* at \$350:

208. Ellison, Harlan (Editor). *Dangerous Visions*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1967. First edition of this landmark anthology. 4to. Contributors include Isaac

Asimov, Robert Bloch, Philip K. Dick, Philip Jose Farmer, J.G. Ballard, Roger Zelazny, and many others. Endpapers a bit faded near hinge, else fine in dust jacket that is lightly frayed at the top edge. Certainly the most influential science fiction anthology of its time. \$250.

And that's two hundred and fifty bucks for a book that cost \$6.95 when Doubleday originally published it and then rushed to pulp all but six or seven thousand copies, because that was their cute way of reminding us how transitory was the nature of science fiction. PFC Ellison thanks the good folks at Joseph the Provider. Don't we all wish we had a carton or two of this "transitory" volume?)

But I had no idea, when I wrote the introduction to *DV* that began:

"What you hold in your hands is more than a book. If we are lucky, it is a revolution ..."

... that I would be unleashing the termagants. But almost instantly those hopeful words — sans the arrogance their critics attached to them — I always thought they were rather tentative and, well, hopeful — brought out a small but strident gaggle of reactionary fans, abetted by an even smaller running-dog yap of professionals, who seemed to go utterly bugfuck at even the existence of *Dangerous Visions*. It seems ludicrous today, in the light of changes and maturation stemming directly from the "new wave" breakout, but in 1967 the hue and cry was as hot ticket controversial as it was unexpected. Entire fanzines were published denouncing "the new wave" as destructive to the moral fiber of the genre. It was characterized as nothing more than adolescent attempts to shock, even to slip through on an unsuspecting audience nothing less than pornography. The work of serious artists was called blasphemous, anarchistic, amoral, immoral, non-moral, unmoral and anti-heroic. It was reviled as unpatriotic, as dishonest, as in-

(Continued to page 55)

BOOKS

By Darrell Schweitzer

The Expectations of Genre

If I may loosely define it, a genre is any pre-existing type of literature. That is, it is there before the author sits down to write. Shakespeare wrote in several distinct genres — the revenge tragedy, the romantic comedy, the history play, etc. You could argue that the verse play itself was a genre. Or maybe a form. I will leave it to the academics to hash that one out.

In modern publishing terms, there are only two kinds of books: brand-name books and genre books. A brand-name book may ostensibly be in a genre (SF, horror, realistic fiction) but actually it sells — and is marketed — as a book by Author X (Heinlein, King, Hemingway). Genre books are all the rest. They are aimed at the reader's expectations of various types of fiction. That is, they sell, not because they are the work of Jonathan Dough or Darrell Schweitzer, but because they are SerilLit or SF or Fantasy or Romance or whatever. The reader is buying books by type, rather than by author. As some perceptive soul put it, you know you've become a brand-name when they put your name on the cover bigger than the title.

In essence, brand-name authors become one-writer genres. Readers buy their books, too, with certain expectations, the same way they do genre books.

This is not to condemn or praise the situation, but merely to

describe. Everything is genre. It merely is.

Commercial considerations aside, how does this effect what is written and how we perceive it? Are genre-expectations reasonable or just a lazy reader's way of

CONSIDER PHLEBAS



IAIN M. BANKS

getting his/her brain massaged exactly the same way it was last time?

The answer is: *all of the above*. Quite reasonably, when Shakespeare's audience went to see *Henry the IVth, Part II* (Aha! A numbered sequel, setting the precedent for *Friday the 13th, Part 46* ...), they expected to see kings and noble lords locked in pivotal struggles, the inside story of why English history worked out the way it had, and maybe a little comedy to bring it all down to a more immediate and human level. And Shakespeare, knowing what was expected of him, delivered.

Similarly, if someone sits down to write a mystery novel,

there had better be a crime to be solved somewhere in the course of things.

The opposite approach is to just write the work, whatever it may be, and see which genre it fits into afterwards. This method sometimes produces superior, more innovative work (though that Shakespeare chap was no slouch), and sometimes it produces something that just doesn't fit in anywhere, and won't get published at all unless some editor feels like bending the rules a little.

(Which brings us back to commercial considerations. If the book does not give the readers what they expect from books of that type, the readers won't come back, the editor may lose his job, and the writer may find it harder to get his next book published.)

Now let's look at a novel that seems deliberately written to fulfill very specific expectations:

Consider Phlebas

By Iain M. Banks

St. Martin's Press, 1988

467 pp., \$18.95

This one is clearly intended to be a *Space Opera* — capital S, capital O, lasers zapping, spaceships whizzing, half a dozen planets exploding before breakfast. It is the author's first SF. He is the author of three previous novels, *The Wasp Factory*, *Walking on Glass*, and *The Bridge*. *The Wasp Factory* is sort of a horror/psychological suspense tale, of excellent repute, for all that (or perhaps, symptomatically, because) *The Irish Times* called it "a work of unparalleled depravity." I know

Rating System

☆☆☆☆☆
☆☆☆☆
☆☆☆
☆☆
☆

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor



nothing of the content of the other two.

Banks is an outsider looking in. I can't imagine that he just wrote this book and later discovered it was science fiction. No, he is deliberately partaking of conventions.

The space opera is a genre-within-a-genre. It is descended from the Victorian future war story, those tales of vast, super-scientific forces clashing in awesome and breathlessly described combat. (Typical examples: the works of George Griffith, particularly *Olga Romanoff* and *The Angel of the Revolution*. Untypical: *The War in the Air* by H.G. Wells. And Michael Moorcock has written numerous modern pastiches, *The Warlord of the Air*, etc.) Sure enough, many of the early pulp space operas, those by E.E. Smith and John W. Campbell particularly, seemed to consist of only war and destruction with brief interludes wherein the hero cooks up some new gadget to top the previous gadget.

After a while, writers decided to insert a plot and some interesting characters, just for variety. Jack Williamson is the real pioneer here. His *The Legion of Space* gave the space opera a lot more life, not to mention genuine charm, than it had previously possessed. After him, Leigh Brackett made it more colorful yet. Later, her influence began to show on the work of her husband, Edmond Hamilton, who had formerly mashed worlds and battle fleets even before Smith and Campbell had ever sold a word. He went on to produce *The Star Kings* and the Morgan Chane/Starwolf books, which are among the very best space operas.

It's curious that the term has never become exclusively derivative. I think it was intended to be. (It was coined by Wilson Tucker as the equivalent of "horse opera," with all the implications of a space western.) Possibly this is because the readers of, say, *Planet Stories* knew that the stuff was all nonsense, but they liked it anyway. So, a little guiltily, a little patronizingly, they set it apart

from real, serious science fiction. Space opera is something we enjoy without taking seriously. One of the most important generic expectations in this case is the absence of pretension.

Enter Iain Banks with his deliberate space opera.

He's pulled it off amazingly well. For though the title may come from *The Waste Land*, this is a book that will appeal to all the readers of Ace Doubles and *Planet Stories* and *Imaginative Tales*. It has everything, including, yes, baroque aliens, worlds exploding, and huge space fleets joined in battle. It also has, courtesy of Jack Williamson's line of development, a cast of ex-

sities (an ocean-going vessel miles long, the destruction of a Ringworld-type habitat) and absurd exoticism (the game of Damage, a lethal, semi-telepathic version of poker traditionally played up to the last minute at sites about to be destroyed) and, what every space opera obviously needs, frantic physical action. He plots well, working from a vast scope worthy of the Lensman series, down to individual pirates, mercenaries, and space scum, and he has the capacity of continually surprising the reader.

The story, briefly, concerns an immense war between the communistic/utopian/machine society of the Culture, and the fanatically religious Idrians. Our hero is a Shaper, an altered human being who can (within reason) change his body at will, making him a superb spy and impersonator. He is sent after a sentient Culture computer which has secreted itself on an off-limits planet. Which is rather like saying *Star Wars* is about this farm kid with a flashlight who defeats a nasty guy in a mask. A lot happens on the way.

The only weakness I can find in all this is that the characters don't have much depth. One of the other generic expectations of space opera is that we shall immediately know where our sympathies lie. The form is about taking sides. Here everything is ambiguous, to the point that, while the hero may feel strongly pro-Idrian (they are at least on the side of life, not machines; the Culture represents stagnation), very little of this comes across to the reader with any conviction.

In the end, Banks uses this very ambiguity to subtly subvert the whole traditional structure of the space opera, but before that it robs the story of much of its emotional impact. (This is the one area where Delany's *Nova* completely outstrips *Consider Phlebas*.) Were Banks not such a complete master of the form, such a superlative razzle-dazzle artist, the whole thing might just collapse under its own weight.

Rating: ☆☆☆



otic characters. And, happily, it is vastly better written than this sort of thing usually is, with occasional, deft hints of parody, but not enough to spoil the effect for those who want to take it all completely seriously.

On a convention panel last spring, David Hartwell referred to this book as "the best space opera ever written." I'm not sure I'd say it is the best (I'm still holding out for Delany's *Nova*, unless you want to consider that Hard Science or proto-Cyberpunk), but it is certainly among the top contenders.

Banks's prose is clear and clean. He can describe immen-

Federation World
By James White
Del Rey Books, 1988
283 pp., \$3.50

James White is best known for his Sector General stories of galactic medicine, and his *The Watch Below* is something of a minor classic. But I've always found him a slightly lackluster writer, very typical of British, rather than American, pulp.

Now I'd be the first to admit that my first-hand knowledge of British pulp is limited. But I have dipped into *Tales of Wonder* and *Fantasy* (pre-War and post-War) and the early *New Worlds*, and my impression is that, where American pulp (say, *Thrilling Wonder* in the late '30s, the Clayton Astounding, or Ray Palmer's *Amazing*) tended toward ludicrously stereotyped characters (muscle-bound heroes, rasping mad scientists, wilting "girls" who were never described as women if they were under fifty), British pulp fiction seemed to lack characterization altogether. It was much more laid back, much more emotionally sedate, with the hero no more than a name. The interest was entirely in the wonder or phenomenon the story centered on.

Sure enough, the hero of *Federation World* is named Martin, and that's about all you ever learn about him. He has no discernible personality or cultural background. He just walks through the stories (this is a fix-up of several stories from *Analog*), and what interest there is lies in the problems he encounters and how cleverly he solves them.

Certainly the background is grand enough, yet another specimen of currently fashionable gigantism: the Federation World of the title is a Dyson sphere, to which a superior race is removing all sentient life in the galaxy for some incomprehensible purpose. Earth, which has been rendered virtually uninhabitable by pollution, is being evacuated. But our hero doesn't fit in. He wants more independence. So he becomes a First Contact specialist and flies

about the galaxy rescuing other races.

Although White has interesting ideas and quite a sophisticated imagination when it comes to creating aliens, his writing is so flat and perfunctory that it becomes hard to care.

A mildly interesting page-turner.

Rating: ☆☆

The Expectation of Being Scared

Prime Evil

Edited by Douglas Winter
New American Library, 1988
322 pp., \$18.95



There's another approach to genre. Iain Banks, the outsider, deliberately embraced space opera conventions in *Consider Phlebas*. The contributors to *Prime Evil*, insiders to a man (why so few women write horror when so many read it, we will discuss some other time), manage to ignore most of the conventions of the horror story — or at least regard them as optional — and still, because they're horror writers and this is a category horror book, the results can be shoehorned in anyway.

I'm not sure it works. Anybody looking for genuine frights had best look elsewhere. While I certainly am not an advocate of slasher books, or the Guy N.

Smith school of the Overt, I think it is possible to err on the side of subtlety — and virtually all these writers do. What I find in *Prime Evil* is lots of very fine prose and only an occasional twinge of disquiet.

Certainly the most unsuitable of the lot is Stephen King's "The Night Flier," about a vampire who commutes to the scenes of his depredations in a private plane. The story isn't particularly polished. It isn't King's best by any means, but it does try, overtly, to deliver fright. Alas, none of the characters are well developed (a marked contrast to the usual King novel), and all we get is an in-joke, for the benefit of those literal-minded readers who have always wondered about a certain indelicate aspect of vampiric physiology.

Several of the other stories fade from memory almost at once. It's been about a week since I finished the book, as I write this, and I find that I've completely blanked on the Charles E. Grant and M. John Harrison stories. I can barely remember the Ramsey Campbell, a clever bit of paranoia disguised as an author's crank-mail. The Dennis Etchison began as an interesting tale of Hollywood, but went opaque at the end. It, too, is rapidly fading. (And forgetfulness, like sleep — as the critic explained to the outraged young playwright after dozing off during Act I — can be an opinion.)

Much more memorably, Peter Straub's "The Juniper Tree" is a fine mainstream story about a sexually abused child and the man that child grew to be, coping with the memory. (Why is it in a horror anthology? Because it's by Peter Straub.) David Morrell gives us 80 percent of a really fine story about a mad painter and his terrible secret, then wrecks it all at the end with a silly explanation about a Meteorite From Hell. Whitley Strieber returns to acknowledged fiction with a genuinely haunting, nightmarish tale, "The Pool." Thomas Ligotti's "Alice's Last Adventure" (an unacknowledged reprint from his collection *Songs of a Dead Dreamer*) tells of a

children's book author whose creations seem to be coming to life — but the story descends into murk and stays there, reminding me how much better Jonathan Carroll does this sort of thing. Paul Hazel's "Having a Woman At Lunch" is surprisingly misogynistic, but a snapper in the manner of Roald Dahl. (Can you figure it out from the title?) Thomas Tessier delivers real horror in a tale of the ultimate in obesity.

But, alas, for the most part this book doesn't work. Even the Clive Barker story fails to excite. What is the problem? Maybe it's that the authors are so self-conscious of their desire to write something beyond the usual

He is not, however (any more than he's ever claimed to be), a heavy-duty intellectual, so there are few really brilliant ideas to be found here. It's pleasant chatter, with lots of inside dope on how famous works were written (Did his wife really rescue *Carrie* from the wastebasket? What about the hotel stay that inspired *The Shining*?), how the movie adaptations were made (he is endlessly forgiving, considering how bad most of the films are), and so forth. But if you read this cover to cover it may become a bit dull after a while. There is a lot of (mostly unavoidable) repetition.

The one nugget that made me sit up and take notice was a very practical bit of advice on how to teach writing to high school students. I taught a seminar of high school kids recently, and I wish I'd read what King had to say first. Next time, I will.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Noted:

A Biographical Dictionary of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists
By Robert Weinberg

Greenwood Press, 1988
346 pp., \$49.95

A very handy reference book for the serious collector, scholar, or professional art director. The bulk of the text consists of entries on artists ranging from Harry Clarke to contemporaries of Carl Lundgren, containing a vast amount of information not available elsewhere. (Many difficult points are cleared up. Who were the three artists using the name Leydenfrost? Which still active artist has had a career spanning six decades? Why was Andrew Brosnatch known among *Weird Tale* writers as 'the master assassin'? Weinberg's long-time pulp expertise serves him well.)

The one weakness is that the citations of the artists' works are extremely selective. But then again, a complete listing of every illustration done by the more prolific ones (Emshwiller, Finlay, or Paul) would fill the whole book, so Weinberg had to draw the line somewhere.

We tend to forget who the artists in our field are, and how important their contribution can be. This book is long overdue.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆☆



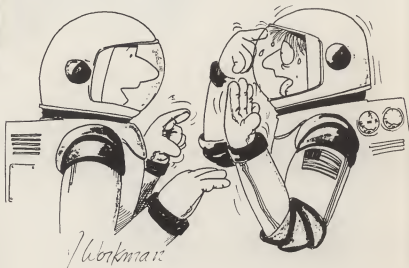
range of horror fiction — that they've succeeded.

Rating: ☆☆

Bare Bones, Conversations on Terror with Stephen King
Edited by Tim Underwood and Chuck Miller
McGraw-Hill, 1988
211 pp., \$16.95

The first trade edition of a collection of interviews with King, previously published in a limited edition by Underwood-Miller. The interviews date from 1979 to 1987. This is a book to be dipped into rather than read all the way through. King is candid, unpretentious, and often witty.

PAGE 18



Third word sounds like hair. Have no chair. No bear.
No care. Have no cares

Nov./Dec. 1988



FROM THE BOOKSHELF

By Janice M. Eisen

Summing Up

Cyteen

By C.J. Cherryh
Warner Books, 1988
680 pp., \$18.95

C.J. Cherryh's newest novel of the Alliance/Union universe (previously portrayed in *Serpent's Reach*, *40,000 in Gehenna*, *Merchanter's Luck*, and the Hugo-winning *Downbelow Station*) is her most ambitious book to date. *Cyteen* is also extremely long, but absorbing. It held my interest steadily most of the way through, except near the end when I got bogged down.

The ending, however, is incomplete and unsatisfying. Cherryh had 680 pages, and she still didn't resolve most of the plot. I felt annoyed and cheated when the book ended abruptly after some climactic violence. It's an obvious lead-in to a sequel, though nowhere on or in the book is it indicated that *Cyteen* is only the first volume. *Caveat emptor*.

Cyteen is set in the capital of Union, about a century after the Company Wars. Ariane Emory, a manipulative, sadistic genius, rules the azi (genetically engineered people) "factory" on Cyteen with an iron hand. When she is murdered, the Project swings into action: an attempt to duplicate her genius, not merely by cloning, but by raising the clone exactly as the first Ariane

was raised. As we watch the Project unfold, we learn that there are forces fighting this effort, including the new Ariane herself.



We also gradually discover the secrets the first Ariane kept, including her bid to save humanity from its future.

Cherryh has learned to make the expository lumps required by her complex settings more palatable by keeping them short and interspersing them throughout the book. The book is introduced by several pages explaining the history of the human colonization of space, and they greatly improved my understanding of the Company Wars and the entire Alliance/Union set-up.

In some ways, however, Cherryh is like the Specials (super-geniuses afforded special protection) she portrays in this novel — she knows all this

brilliant, fascinating stuff, but she can't always successfully convey it to others. I found many of her explanations of science and politics very confusing, especially as the book moved toward its climax.

The planet Cyteen is believably portrayed, with a great deal of convincing detail, and Union is much less one-dimensionally villainous than it appeared to be in *Downbelow Station* and *40,000 in Gehenna*. The characters are realistically ambiguous, though there are a few too many, so that some don't get enough time and attention to become clear to the reader. Part of Cherryh's problem is that the main characters aren't terribly likeable, although she handles them well. She will never be known as a stylist, but her prose is clear.

Cyteen is a fascinating view of C.J. Cherryh's evolving future history. When you read it (and you should), come prepared to be baffled at times, and forewarned that you'll have to wait for the sequel to see how it ends.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

The White Raven

By Diana L. Paxson
William Morrow, 1988
320 pp., \$18.95

Diana Paxson's retelling of the Tristan and Iseult legend lends itself to an obvious comparison with Marion Zimmer Bradley's Arthurian novel, *The Mists of Avalon*. And yes, if you liked *Mists*, you'll love *The White Raven*. But even if you didn't like Bradley's book, you'll probably

Rating System

☆☆☆☆☆
☆☆☆☆
☆☆☆
☆☆
☆

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

like this one. I certainly did.

The White Raven is lyrically written, and the rhythm of the prose creates an atmosphere that transports the reader to the world of Celtic legend. The novel is rich in detail and myth; Paxson did a huge amount of research, and it shows. The book that has resulted is exciting, vivid, and real.

In retelling a legend, the author faces the difficulty that we know the characters' eventual fate; in this case, however, they are so well drawn and you care about them so much that you become deeply involved nevertheless. I was breathless at times.

Also, there is no feeling of anachronistic 20th-century

This powerful, enthralling book deserves at least the success of *The Mists of Avalon*. It is brilliantly done, and I urge everyone to read it.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Conquest: Unicorn & Dragon,
Volume II

By Lynn Abbey
Avon, 1988
262 pp., \$6.95

Lynn Abbey's sequel to *Unicorn & Dragon* has just appeared, and it works pretty well. Though there's obviously a third book planned, *Conquest* is not as weak as the middle books of trilogies sometimes are. Unfor-

pulsive, continually causing problems by thoughtless use of her talent. Wildecen, the quieter sister, has no such natural talent, but near the end of the first book she began experimenting with sorcery, in which her missing power is supplied by magical objects.

This second book picks up the story after the near-destruction of Hafwynder Manor, when Alison and Wildecen find themselves effectively prisoners under the "protection" of a local Norman lord, while the Saxon kingdom continues to fragment. It should be understandable even for those who haven't read the previous volume.



thought by these 6th-century characters. Nor did Paxson take the easy way out of "Christian Church bad, Druidic/Celtic religion good." Instead, and more realistically, the two work together, though sometimes at odds.

Paxson displays a wonderful storytelling ability and a rare gift for language. Despite one howler, even the sex scenes — which in many books are done awkwardly enough to throw the reader out of the fantasy world — partake of the magic of the prose. After I finished the novel, I wanted to go back to the beginning and read it again.

Unfortunately, it suffers by comparison to *The White Raven*, which on the surface it resembles.

The book is set in England in 1065. The Saxon realm is falling apart in internecine fighting, and William the Bastard (later known as the Conqueror) waits across the English Channel to pick up the pieces. Finding themselves in the middle of the conflict are sixteen-year-old Alison and Wildecen of Hafwynder Manor, who were raised as sisters although Wildecen is a fosterling of unknown origin. Alison possesses a very strong magical power to shape people's thoughts and actions; she is also spoiled and im-

Abbey has done a good job of characterization, both of the protagonists and of the other major characters. Though Alison is very unlikable — willful, self-centered, lacking in respect or compassion for others — her trial by fire in this book changes and redeems her. The historical and mythical setting is well done.

The novel's main flaw is pedestrian prose. Besides occasional phrases that struck me as anachronistic, the writing lies flat on the page. There's no lyricism or magic to it at all. This problem keeps the novel in the realm of good but not great, though the plot and characters are interest-

ing; it never drew me in and held me. Nonetheless, I will be interested to read the third volume.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Walkabout Woman
By Michaela Roessner
Bantam/Spectra, 1988
272 pp., \$3.95

Michaela Roessner's excellent first novel is a beautiful, original fantasy woven from the magic of the Australian Aborigines. It's very well-written and absorbing, with excellent settings and characterization.

Raba is a young Aborigine girl with very strong magic power — so strong that it must be

the white missionaries an intrusion. (The only sour note, to me, is a complete rejection of technology, including agriculture, but that's not really a fair objection since the book is steeped in Aborigine thought.) Part II of the book, with Raba's rediscovery of her power and heritage, works less well; being shorter and set in the white world, it lacks some of the richness and interest of the first part.

Still, both parts hang together well, and the ending is satisfying, though sad. I expect great things from Roessner, and this novel is highly recommended.

Rating: ☆☆☆

The Name of the Sun
By B. W. Clough
DAW Books, 1988
304 pp., \$3.95

With *The Name of the Sun*, B.W. Clough completes the trilogy she began with *The Crystal Crown* and *The Realm Beneath* (both of which have been reissued). It is the story of Liras-ven Tsormelezok, a young man chosen out of all the nobility of Averidan to become — unwillingly — Shan King and wear the magically powerful Crystal Crown. He faces war, arranged marriage, magic, exile, and captivity with not very good grace.

At its base, this is a familiar fantasy about a young man thrust into rule who learns heroism and kingship. What sets Clough's books apart is her original, quirky voice, which peeps through the standard tapestry she's woven. These glimmers reveal a talent which needs a more original setting to work in.

The characters are interesting, real, and likable, although by the third book Liras-ven's foreign wife Melayne has become an obnoxious bitch whom I wanted to kill. Clough's fantasy world is not homogeneous, but composed of numerous distinct cultures, each foreign to our own and believable, with a depth of detail not often found in this sub-genre.

The trilogy is enjoyable, if not demanding, reading, from an author with the potential to be a

major talent.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Rendezvous
By D. Alexander Smith
Ace, 1988
288 pp., \$3.50

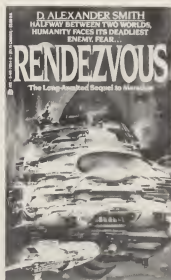
D. Alexander Smith's second novel is a very good and highly inventive first contact story. *Rendezvous* takes place in a setting reminiscent of Murray Leinster's "First Contact," but it is much more mature and realistic.

The crew of the *Open Palm* has journeyed for seven years to reach the rendezvous point with the Cygnan aliens. (The story of



hidden from the old men of the tribe, who would kill her as a threat to their power. With help from the spirits of the Land, she will be able to return her people to the Dreamtime. While still a child, she must fight a sorcerer who would destroy the tribe's ties to the Dreamtime. Afterward, she enters the "white-fella" world, and must decide whether to stay or to return to her people and her Land.

The background and characters are so well done that, despite the utter foreignness of Aborigine thought to white Americans, it isn't long before their ways start to seem normal and the ways of



that journey was told in Smith's first novel, *Marathon*.) The humans are eager for the meeting, though the captain of the *Open Palm* is wary. The Cygnans, however, are afraid of the humans, and if no understanding is reached, that fear could mean the end of both crews. By the second half of the book I couldn't put it down — not because of cheap suspense, but because I was so involved I wanted to see it through to the end (I stayed up till four in the morning finishing it).

The human characters are not pleasant to be with, but they're realistic. Even the

three-year-old girl actually acts like an intelligent three-year-old, not a midget adult. If, like me, you haven't read *Marathon*, you probably will find the human characters somewhat confusing, having missed a lot of important events and characterization. In particular I found the characters of the ship's computer and the captain problematic and difficult to understand.

The Cygnans are fascinating, and their legends are well told and believable as legends. You truly get into their heads and their behavior stops seeming alien. They are, however, truly alien; Smith has avoided the common mistake of having aliens act like humans in funny make-

Baen, 1988
307 pp., \$3.50

David Drake's follow-up to *Men Hunting Things* (What's next? *Things* and *Men Hunting? Man-Things Hunting Other Things?*) is not a shared-world anthology, though it looks like one. It's that old favorite sub-species, the thematic reprint anthology. And, like its predecessor, it's a good one. Because of the theme it has the air of horror, though Drake stretches the theme for a couple of the stories, as a good anthropologist should.

The majority of the stories Drake has gathered were originally published in the '40s and '50s, so that is the overall feel of the anthology. Most of them are not over-anthologized, though this volume includes more well-known ones than did the previous anthology (for example, A.E. van Vogt's "Black Destroyer"). He's found some stories by unfamiliar authors, and some unfamiliar stories by familiar authors. Unless you're an expert on the pulps, you're bound to find something new here.

The quality of Drake's selections is very high. The best stories are "Happy Ending" by Henry Kuttner, with its unusual and deceptive structure; "It" by Theodore Sturgeon, whose featured monster is terrifying in its lack of malevolence; "Ancient, My Enemy" by Gordon R. Dickson, a psychological study; and "The Hunting Ground" by David Drake, a chilling horror story. I thought the only story in the book that was not up to snuff was Robert Silverberg's "Collecting Team," a very old-fashioned story with a "twist" I saw coming miles away.

Despite its rather silly-sounding theme, this anthology series is enjoyable and Drake does a fine job of unearthing obscure but good stories. I recommend it.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Speaker to Heaven
By Atanielle Annyn Noel
Baen, 1988
279 pp., \$3.50

Speaker to Heaven is an interesting novel of witchcraft (psychic power), politics, and murder. It's science fiction, but with the feel of a fantasy. Noel has managed to write a post-holocaust novel that skips most of the clichés.

The book is set centuries after the Cataclysm, an unspecified disaster, wiped out civilization. It has been reborn on the island of Calavairn (formerly part of California) with the aid of psychic powers, which have been studied and developed into a religion. But now Calavairn itself is endangered. The old *Speaker to Heaven* was found dead in a frightening and ominous manner. A young student from the Uni-



up. He makes their evolutionary history clear without resorting to lectures, and it's interesting and original; I like the idea of slow, clumsy scavengers defeating the clever monkey-equivalents by developing the capacity for a group-mind.

I recommend this book even if you can't locate a copy of *Marathon* (which I hope Ace reissues). Smith's talent for characterization and creating convincing aliens is remarkable.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Things Hunting Men
Edited by David Drake



versity is missing and presumably dead. Most important of all, the Stone which gives the *Speaker to Heaven* divine visions has stopped speaking.

The complicated plot of murder and witchcraft works very well. The characters are well drawn, the psychic powers are believably developed, and the situation feels real. The novel has texture, successfully transporting the reader to Calavairn. It's well-written, but a bit purple in spots — Noel needs to exercise a little more control. Also, the character of the villain remains foggy than it ought to.

The novel's points — the importance of access to knowledge and another one which I can't explain without giving away the ending — are well-made and not stomped into the ground. I recommend *Speaker to Heaven*, and I'm looking forward to the author's future work.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Minds, Machines and Evolution

By James P. Hogan
Bantam/Spectra, 1988
323 pp., \$4.50

James P. Hogan's new collection of fiction and non-fiction is very disappointing. I haven't read any of his novels, and unfor-



tunately this book did not give me any incentive to do so. Hogan has a lot of interesting ideas, but he does not turn them into good stories.

A major problem with Hogan's fiction is that he seems to feel that the way to make a point is to hit the reader over the head with a baseball bat. This is quite tiresome. His humorous pieces fail to be humorous, partly because of the baseball bat problem (as in "Neander-Tale"), partly because of his over-reliance on puns, wordplay, and "funny" names, and in some cases because of length. In one piece, "Down to Earth," which

portrays a supposed meeting between Galileo and Sir Isaac Newton, Galileo speaks in a Chico Marx-style Italian dialect that is not funny, just embarrassing.

Even stories with potential are made less interesting by expository lumps. "Silver Shoes for a Princess" could be a sweet story but turns into a lecture about the creation of life. "Till Death Us Do Part," a nastily ironic piece that could have been the best story in the collection, spends two pages describing in detail four characters who thereafter vanish from the plot. "Assassin" is simply too long for the concept sustaining it. The most successful story is "The Absolutely Foolproof Alibi," a complex tale of murder, time travel, and paradoxes, and fortunately Hogan keeps the preaching down to about a page in the middle of the story.

The book also includes the prologue from Hogan's novel *Code of the Life-Maker*. It's interesting, though of course not truly a story. The non-fiction is so-so. The autobiographical essay is the most interesting; the science essays are nothing special.

Hogan generates fascinating ideas and shows occasional flashes of real story-telling ability, but he's got to learn that, in fiction, lessons are best taught subtly.

Rating: ☆☆

Classifieds

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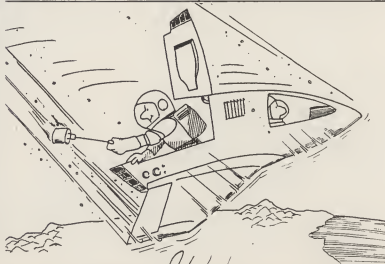
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True Allegiance

By Steven R. Boyett

Art by Charles Lang

She stood out on that sidewalk like a sore glootza. I mean, she was just *standing* there, all prettied up in some kind of groovy spray-on outfit. Just looking at her made me hungry. She had her back to me, but she was one of those shockers who made you know deep in your olive-green viscera that when she turned around she'd have the kind of soft brown eyes that were, like, the coolest of modern art tones.

The vibes are *too* weird. I mean to indicate to you that I knew what this morsel looked like before she ever turned around; I could picture her slightly upturned nose as if already looking at it, could see the play of muscle beneath well-tended flesh. Well, I just *had* to tap her on the shoulder with my upper right manipulator, me being hip to the local customs and all.

"Excuse me, honey baby mine," I say, "but wouldst thou be interested in partaking of a woefully ephemeral experience with the likes of mine humble self?" *Too* smooth.

So what does she do? Why, I'm scarce given the once-over with those eyes, feeling them reach through me and tingling the old secondary nervous system, you can wager, when they kind of pop out a bit — looking most *unpretty* — and her mouth opens so wide I think it's gonna tear at the corners. Suddenly all I can see are incisors, canines, molars, and wet, pink flesh of gum, of palate and tonsils and uvula — a sight to make the old circulatory pump go pat-a-pit, if you can dig — and she screams to wake the permanently sleeping-like.

"No, no, Peerless Package," I soothe. "Something has been mournfully lost in the translating-like. I seek merely to reaffirm old ties, your hip-type people in tune and allied with mine against the evil Rrawgliw invaders, those green-dripping interfamilial sexual travesties —"

— Okay, I extend profuse apologies! Retain your coolness and do not hit me; I am merely trying to tell the tale as you yourself have asked me to.

To continue.

I further spake to this precious package: "In the interests of diplomacy, Madam, I meant only to inquire as to the possibility of a friendly *liaison* between —"

And here I ceased my suaveness, for there came swaggering up a representative of the local *gen-*

darmerie, twirling his shockstick and looking at mine self with a fascistic varietness I have come to regard as sadly routine.

"Any trouble?" he asks importantly.

"No, indeed, Mr. Peace Officer, sir; I —"

"Clamp it, spacefreak," he croaks to my perplexed self, gesturing stagily with that utterly ridiculous aluminum shockstick. Had I not immediately tightened my vocal apparatus, this hastily trained mercenary enforcing oppressive Establishment policies might have actually caused intentional harm to my diplomatically immune person.

"No, it's okay," says this epitome of human femaliciousness. "Really." She glances at me — with speculation? — and I wave my manipulators in what can be perceived as nothing other than friendly fashion. "I was just ... startled for a minute. I wasn't expecting to see a Fomisian on a street corner, that's all. I'm not used to them yet."

The cop digs on her meaning; his small head nods on his fragile neck. "Lady, I never will be," he says, and imparts unto me a vicious-type and contemptuous-like sneer before bipedaling away. What can you do? Representational authority is everywhere similar, I'm so sure.

The brown-eyed candidate for Miss Most was grooving on me mightily. "I really am sorry," pipes she (they really communicate through an eating apparatus — the b'dwango boggles!). "My — my husband was killed on Kath'Id. I'm sure you can understand ..."

Understand, indeed! Kath'Id was the site of the last major battle between Fomis and Earth (thus accounting for her unwarranted reaction to my only-polite and *tres chic* presence), before my people saw the Way and the Light and transferred allegiances to fight with the humans against the snard-mucking Rrawgliw enemy —

— Okay, do not hit me again; I shall remain pased to the narrative.

Well.

"Chill out, Fair Maiden," I console her with ultrasophisticated winsomeness. "It is true that animosity has sadly developed between our respective and eminently respectable species. Would that I could

(Continued to page 56)



ABORIGINES

By Laurel Lucas

Ride the Wave



Harlan Ellison is an author whose enormous talents cannot be neatly categorized. Suffice it to say that science fiction fans are among those who love his work.

In the essay "Wave," Ellison gives us insights into the rise of the "New Wave" in science fiction in the 1960s. His own fiction and vision as an editor played a seminal part in that literary revolution.

Ellison has won numerous Hugo and Nebula awards in the past and one more of his works was nominated for a Hugo this year: The script "I, Robot: the



Harlan Ellison

Movie," which appeared in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. *The Essential Ellison* (Nemo Press), a retrospective of his work, was also nominated.

A noted screenwriter, Ellison says he is a "loyal union man" and was doing "nothing in film and television" when I spoke to him in July as the Writers Guild strike entered its 20th week.

He was, nevertheless, "keeping busy." He has a new collection of short stories, *Angry Candy*, which Houghton Mifflin is publishing in October; a collec-



Pat Morrissey with her latest work

tion of his film reviews, *Harlan Ellison's Watching*, due out in September from Underwood-Miller; and a lead article in *Playboy* magazine this December on modern comic books.

The cover of this issue is an illustration by **Pat Morrissey** for a story by **Elissa Malcohn** titled "Arachne."

Morrissey has illustrated several stories for *Aboriginal*, the most recent being "Birthplace," by **Chris Boyce**, in the March-April 1988 issue. This is her first cover.

She's just finished illustrating an **L. Sprague DeCamp** book for an Easton Press series of science fiction classics.

In her capacity as an artist for the Hartford Planetarium, she is currently working on a show about Mars.

Morrissey says she recently got a behind-the-scenes tour of the Baltimore Museum of Science after finishing a panorama for its planetarium.

She plans to travel to a total of nine conventions this year.

When I spoke to her, she and her artist husband, **Wayne Morrissey**, were preparing to attend the WorldCon in New Orleans.

But she still managed to find



Elissa Malcohn

some time this summer to relax on their boat, the *Nostromo*.

Elissa Malcohn, who gave us the poem "All Creatures Great and Small" in the March-April 1988 issue, is back with the mythological "Arachne."

Malcohn, who received her first award for fiction at age 13,

writes that she has had a hectic life recently. Among the things that have happened on the negative side: two relatives and a friend died, and she had to move on short notice when she discovered her Cambridge, Mass., abode was an illegal apartment.

On the positive side, her health is improving, she has a lovely new apartment with air conditioning and plenty of storage space, she got a raise in her job at the Harvard Business School and is expecting a promotion soon, and she recently shared a peanut butter sandwich with a wild hare on an island in the middle of Spy Pond in Arlington, Mass.

Robert A. Metzger continues to delight us with weird stories, this one called "Unfit to Print," which features aliens posing as **Elvis Presley** imitators.



Robert A. Metzger

Metzger, a physicist at Hughes Research Labs in Malibu, Calif., has been "in print" for only a little over a year now, and this is his fifth story for *Aboriginal*. His last one was "A Third Chance," in the May-June 1988 issue, and several more are waiting in the wings.

Except for "Instrument of Allah," which he sold to *Weird Tales* a year ago, Metzger says he hasn't sold stories to any other magazines besides *Aboriginal*. And get this: he says he has gotten very nice, personalized rejection letters from three different editors who say that his stories are interesting, but just too damn

strange.

"That took me back a bit," he writes. "When the consensus of SF editors is that your work is too strange, that really puts you out



Larry Blamire

on the fringe of what the world considers to be normal."

But Metzger isn't alarmed, "I actually find that writing stories that I like to label as gonzo SF and working as a scientist is a nice mix. My bent imagination allows me to tackle technical problems from a slightly different perspective, and the results are often strange, but never boring."

The artist for "Unfit to Print," **Larry Blamire**, says he has started working with a larger canvas and taking a more impressionistic approach to his art. He gets to use bigger brushes and "have more fun," he says.

Blamire is spending his



Patricia Anthony

summer following the Boston Red Sox, painting, and writing plays. When I spoke to him in July, his

latest play, the one-act "Ha'nt" was about to open in Boston and he had come up with a title for his next one: "Cabin Aurora."

Pat Anthony, like Metzger, is an *Aboriginal* discovery who is starting to attract a fan following. Her last story was "Good Neighbor" in the Sept.-Oct. 1988 issue.

"Anomaly," in this issue, is a tale of past-life regression with a twist and brings Anthony's *Aboriginal* story total to five.

Anthony has just become a member of the Science Fiction Writers of America. She also told me she was preparing to speak at a University of Texas at Dallas writers' conference on the topic of science fiction short stories.

She's working on a horror novel that's "lots of fun. It's well, extremely commercial. I think my agent will like it."

Anthony says it's about "an



J. Wallace Jones

overweight realtor who learns the true meaning behind the power of positive thinking."

The illustrator for "Anomaly" is **J. Wallace Jones**.

Jones just won back-to-back awards for a fantasy painting. It won Best-of-Show at the Deep-SouthCon and the Polly Freas Memorial Award at LibertyCon. He also has an illustration in the July 1988 *Space World*.

Jones made his professional science fiction debut in the May-June 1988 issue of *Aboriginal* with illustrations he did for "A Speaking Likeness," by **Bonita Kale**.

As a result of that, he was invited to sign autographs at a local comic-book store.

Jones, a Tennessee native

(Continued to page 58)

Unfit

(Continued from page 10)

"Our laws state that, before we can strip the carbon resources of a planet, we determine that no intelligent life is present. After detailed analysis of this planet, it is our contention that no intelligence exists." He finally smiled.

"And how do you define intelligence?" I asked.

"We are most generous in our definition," said Elvis Four. "We make our intentions known to the creatures of a given planet through some major conduit of their communications network." He pointed an incredibly fat finger wearing an equally fat diamond ring toward me. "Specifically, in this case, the *Global Enquirer*. We estimate your total readership at 50 million people. If only one percent, or a half a million, of your readers respond within a period of ten days after the announcement appears, and indicate that they do not wish to be reduced to their fundamental components and their carbon content transported off planet, we will judge this world as possessing intelligent life, and we will depart without taking any action." He sat back into his creaking chairs.

Somehow I managed not to laugh. When this story ran, we'd be lucky to see a hundred letters. Readers of the *Global Enquirer* were not exactly of the letter-writing variety.

"Can you be somewhat more specific about our destruction?" I asked.

Elvis Two, the nanomolecular biologist, stood once again.

I instantly regretted having asked the question.

"I certainly can, sweetums," she said. "I've grown a large colony of nano-mechanoids that will perform the task."

"And what exactly is a nano-mechanoid?" I asked, not really wanting to encourage her, but I was just too damn curious to let it pass.

"Please turn to page twelve in your press kit," she said.

I flipped pages until I came to the blurry photo on page twelve. It was a picture of what looked like a lumpy black widow spider complete with a red hourglass on its belly. I had been hoping for something a little more creative.

"Notice the dimensions," she said. "A single nano-mechanoid has a cross section of only 100 nanometers." She smiled sweetly, exposing those disgusting buck teeth.

Hell, at that size you could fit millions of them onto the head of a pin. That image was inspirational. I'd have to start the art work the second I got back to the office.

"The nano-mechanoid's function is two-fold," she said. "It is designed to seek and harvest carbon, which it spins into a single crystal lattice, creating diamond, but, in addition, it uses the waste material from the host it is mining to create copies of itself. If a single nano-mechanoid invades an average-sized human, in less than three minutes the body will be mined of nearly two pounds of diamond and over 100 billion

nano-mechanoids will be constructed. I'm certain that you can appreciate the exponential growth aspect of this process. A single nano-mechanoid let loose in Van Nuys can reduce the entire global organic population in sixteen hours."

I understood. Hell, I was a science writer after all. I already knew how the headline would read. *Spiders from Space Will Devour Human Race in Less than a Day — Unless You Help.* I had everything I needed. Almost everything.

"One last question," I said. "What do you need with all that diamond?"

Elvis Four, the Chinaman, stood. "Diamond is used as the basis of galactic commerce," he said.

It figured. The intergalactic lawyer smelled a buck.

Elvis Four then sat down to the accompaniment of what sounded like an exploding whoopee cushion.

Elvis Thirteen stood. "Please forward to us all responses you receive regarding our intentions. If at the end of ten days after the story's appearance we have not received a half million negative replies, we will start the nano-mechanoid seeding, and reduce all carbon-based life to its fundamental components."

"Sounds good," I said.

This story was a dream. It would write itself.

*** * * * *

I had zipped off the first installment of the story and sent it through the approval mill. The editors drooled, demographics said it would boost circulation by two million, and the manager in advertising promised to name his first born, regardless of sex, after me. I was riding high.

Then the story hit legal. These were the people who had no qualms about a story reporting that a prominent Motown singer was the love child of an African princess and a lesser demon from hell, and the bit about the Army testing neutron grenades in Harlem. Having passed on those supposedly noncontroversial topics, they saw fit to red-letter my piece.

They were suspicious, they said. They didn't like the fact that I had been given a press kit. Things looked too neat and clean. It made them nervous. They were afraid that the *Global Enquirer* was being used by some unethical group.

Then they slapped me with the ultimate insult. It was their opinion that the story as it now stood was unfit to print. The fact that lawyers weren't splattered across the walls was a testament to my great will power.

So here I was, at nearly midnight, freezing my ass and crawling around trashbins in the back of some warehouse in Van Nuys. A camera with a telephoto zoom lens dangled from my neck. My assignment from the lawyers: get shots of the real Elvis impersonators. I was certain that they were just a bunch of wackos, certainly imaginative, but just wackos. I had little doubt that when they weren't wailing into their microphones, they worked in auto part stores or ran catering trucks.

These warehouses were of vintage World War II construction, built of galvanized sheet and warped wood. I had peered through at least a dozen cracks and seen nothing more than a lot of empty space, a few



crates, piles of trash, and a cat doing quick work on what might have been a rat. I took a few shots of the hungry cat. I figured it was something that the lawyers could identify with.

I peered inside the next knothole that had light streaming through it. This was it. At least a half dozen of the Elvis impersonators stood in a circle in the middle of a large clear space of warehouse floor.

Something growled.

Putting the camera up to the crack, I zoomed the telephoto to maximum magnification. The already colossal ass of the Chinaman, Elvis Four, completely filled the lens. I scanned the group. That scrawny biologist bitch was there, along with Elvis Thirteen, the midget, and a few others that I hadn't really paid any attention to.

My lens seemed to jerk in the direction of a snarling sound.

Held by a small length of chain that was bolted into the concrete floor was the biggest, ugliest pit bull I'd ever seen. Its teeth were bared, and its muzzle was white with foam. Then, suddenly, it whimpered and collapsed to the cement floor. It was staring directly at Elvis Two. If there was any woman that could scare the shit out of a pit bull, it would be her. Clenched in her bony fist was what looked like a kid's water pistol. She pumped the trigger.

I focused back on the dog. It shook, as if trying to dry itself, then began to shiver. A howl that rattled my back teeth poured through the cracks in the warehouse's galvanized sheet wall.

I zoomed onto the dog's howling face.

Its eyeballs dribbled from their sockets.

I almost dropped the camera, and something cold seemed to crawl up into my gut. It was obviously time to cut and run, but I found myself staring through the camera again.

The pit bull vibrated and shook as if its tail had been jammed into a light socket. Its fur undulated, and its back left leg convulsed and banged at the floor until it snapped off at the knee. The severed leg continued to dance across the concrete.

My dinner almost came up, but I swallowed it for a second time.

The dog stopped moving and lay there like a swollen sausage casing with a glandular condition, sort of boneless and bulging.

Bang!

This time the camera almost flew from my hands. Fumbling, I finally got it back up to my eye.

The pit bull had vanished. All that remained was a large pool of red goo that seeped across the floor, and something that shimmered.

Elvis Two walked through the ever-expanding puddle, kicking up jellied blood, then bent down. She picked something up.

I zoomed the camera, focusing on her hand.

Big ice-white chunks of something sat on her open palm.

I didn't want to see it, but that sparkle clinched it.

Elvis Two held a handful of diamonds.

The camera dropped from my now wooden hands and thumped against my chest. All I could hear was the jackhammer whap of blood pounding in my ears.

My feet tingled, and my tongue had gone dust dry.

It was all real.

I fell back, my ass hitting the ground with a splash as I hit an oily puddle of water. They had needed a chump, and I had happily obliged. Some warped set of ethics had forced them to reveal themselves, but they did it in such a way that they guaranteed that no one would ever believe them or try to stop them. I had almost given them everything they needed.

"Shit!" I hissed. I'd been used. It was time to cut and run. I swiveled, and the gravelly muck under my ass shredded my slacks.

I was not alone.

"This is most unfortunate," said Elvis Thirteen. He was flanked by the Chinaman and a black Elvis who looked like a linebacker for the Rams.

"Well, sweetsums," said a voice that scared the shit out of me more than any voice I'd ever heard before, "it's time to say good night."

Elvis Two stepped forward, her water pistol leading the way.

"No!" I managed to scream.

I felt a light mist hit my face.

The world turned black. I had just been reduced to diamonds and red goo by a scrawny bitch in an Elvis suit. That was certainly bad enough, but in some ways even worse was the realization that those scum lawyers had been right.

I opened my eyes.

I was not dead, nor had I been reduced to a pile of red goo and diamonds. I was in a hard-backed chair, and my hands were tied behind my back. I stared down at my lap.

Reprieved, but I had no idea why.

"You should not have returned," said a voice.

I looked up. Elvis Thirteen had lost his glasses, and his piercing stare seemed to slice right through me.

I smiled. Elvis Thirteen looked mad enough to eat me raw, then use my bones for toothpicks. I obviously had them right where I wanted them. Unfortunately, I didn't have even the vaguest idea of just where that was.

Elvis Thirteen stepped back. All of them stood around me. Elvis Two was grinding her teeth and still clutched that toy pistol. If she took another shot, I had little doubt that this time that I'd be rendered into goo and diamonds.

"He never should have returned," said Elvis Eleven to his cohorts. "I tracked and analyzed him for months. He's an egotistical, shallow, money-grubbing, over-sexed moron. He should have been incapable of figuring out what was actually occurring."

Under any other circumstances, I might have gotten just a tad upset. However, this didn't seem quite the right time or place, so I simply smiled.

"Look at that stupid grin!" shouted Elvis Eleven. "He must have somehow known all along." He walked up to me and poked at my chest with his stiff index finger. "You knew, didn't you?"

I continued to smile since it seemed to unnervé him so. His description of me might not have been all that far off the mark, but he had ignored one vitally

important skill that I possessed. Creative nonfiction was my forte. I didn't care what part of the galaxy this schmuck came from, he was outclassed when it came to that. They had been fools to let me see them so rattled. It's a trivial task to convince someone of something they already believe is true. Hell, the *Global Enquirer* had been doing that to 50 million people for years.

"You were all so pathetic," I said while still smiling. "You gave me all the facts. You were too damn generous, and too willing to answer all my questions. It was obvious from the start that you were more than just the bunch of wackos you were pretending to be."

I swallowed the lump in my throat. If I, and everyone else on this planet, actually survived this, I could never let the truth get back to those scam lawyers. Never.

"Never tell the little lie," I said. "People always catch the petty stuff. It's the big lie that everyone always believes. That's usually a pretty good strategy, and that's what you were depending on, but I saw right through it. You were trying so hard to convince me that you were crazy that it was obvious that you were actually telling the truth. I just came back tonight to gather the hard evidence."

Elvis Two hurled her toy pistol against the floor. It exploded into a ball of blue flame.

I had them. It was now time to add insult to injury. I had confirmed their worst fear, but now it was time for my big lie.

"I've got the real story written, and it's ready to go out on every wire service in the country. I had hoped to gather a few more facts tonight, but even if I don't return the story will go out tomorrow morning. By noon tomorrow you'll have your answer to the question of whether there's intelligent life on this planet, and I don't think you have any doubt as to what that answer will be."

I smiled with a grin that went from ear to ear.

"Get off this planet," I said simply.

I could feel it. I had them. The schmucks had bought it.

The Chinaman waddled forward. A smile filled his fat face.

My guts churned. Smiling lawyers never brought good news.

"As I told you earlier, Mr. Hutchings," he said, "we are ethical beings. We abide by our laws." He held up a fat index finger. "However ..."

I felt a galactic loophole coming on.

"If we are not here to receive their response in the morning, this entire situation will be voided. In the legal sense, this offer will have never taken place, and therefore, at some later point in time, and at our convenience, we will simply tender it again in some slightly different manner. We thank you for teaching us this valuable lesson. Goodbye."

He hit the cement floor like a sack of wet sand. The others followed like dominoes. The warehouse echoed to the sounds of metal banging against concrete as their microphones hit the pavement. They were all on the floor, except for one.

Elvis Two stepped forward, and bent toward me.

She smelled rancid, like spoiled meat. She kissed me on the forehead, then took one step back. "I'll see you again, sweetums," she said. Then her eyelids fluttered, and she hit the floor.

The ropes fell from my hands, but I couldn't stand. The warehouse was now silent except for the sound of a distant murmuring voice. Turning in my chair, I saw that it came from a TV mounted into the far warehouse wall. It was tuned into one of those vivid preachers who, with his red face and curly blond hair, was shaking his Bible in the direction of the camera.

My gut tied itself into a knot, and my lungs seemed to seize. These aliens weren't idiots. They must have had a backup plan in case the Elvis scam folded.

The aliens would be looking for something that would give them quick exposure to millions of people who were conditioned to being led around by the nose and never questioned what they were being told. Religion would be a natural for them. My science writing days were over. First thing in the morning, I'd have to start the paperwork to get myself transferred into Reverend Lazlo's Religion and Possessed Major Home Appliance Section. I didn't know how they'd reappear or exactly what their scam would be, but my reporter's gut told me that I'd better be working the Religion beat when they resurfaced.

I'd be on the lookout for *thirteen* religious weirdos, with a bent for doing impersonations. As I thought that, a picture popped into my head — it was *The Last Supper*, featuring Jesus Christ and His twelve apostles.

I quickly stood. This could be one hell of a story. □

Suppertime in Sagittarius

By Charlotte
Snowden Bridges

*Alone on my hill, sitting we.
For both suns to set, waiting me.
To lights in the sky, pointing he,
With fingers two more than my three.
Small line on his face, making round.
My front-tuning ears, hearing sound.
His fingered appendage somehow
To my purpled self, pointing now,
And liquid like falling from air
His one pair of eyes, filling there.
Why you eating not, asking mine.
Your big metal egg, tasting fine.*

Goodness

By Robert Reed

Art by Wendy Snow-Lang

The first time was on a snowy, blustery day when he was going to be late for school. Curtis was tromping down the hill when he heard a boy coming up behind him. The boy asked, "What's your name?" and Curtis told him. He didn't want to talk or even glance over his shoulder. The boy asked, "What are you doing?" when he got closer. "You're sure in a hurry." Of course Curtis was hurrying. The bell was going to ring, and he was sure to be late. Curtis was never late for school. That was misbehaving. He had a reputation for obedience and attentiveness and good grades. He was a joy for teachers and the pride of his parents, and he couldn't stand the thought of disappointing everyone. So he took longer strides, faster strides, and the boy came up beside him anyway, saying, "I've got an idea. You want to have some fun?"

That's when Curtis got suspicious.

He glanced sideways. He saw an ordinary winter coat and jeans, black gloves and a blue face mask with little white crosses. It could have been any kid. They were famous for getting the clothes right, and he knew it. But when Curtis looked closer he saw the bulging eyes and the strange round mouth, sharp teeth in rows and extra lips between the rows of teeth, a long curling tongue slipping into the frigid air. "Watch," said the alien. "Watch this."

Curtis listened to the grinding crunch of gears. A school bus full of kids who weren't going to be late, who weren't walking with aliens, was rumbling down the street.

"Let's play ambush," said the alien.

"Go away," said Curtis. "Leave me alone."

"Oh, come on and play. Are you scared?" It had a teasing voice and a wicked little laugh. "Why are you scared?"

"I'm not suppose to play with you. Go away."

"Come on. We'll ambush the bus!"

Curtis said nothing.

"Oh, why not? It'll be fun." The alien made an odd snorting sound, then asked, "What are you afraid of?"

Curtis kept quiet. He concentrated on the distant school, its neat brick faces promising order and security, and also on his Mother's imagined voice. He wondered why this wasn't as easy as she had promised. He had told the alien to leave him alone, and that should be enough. But here came the bus, and the alien screamed, "Ambush!" and threw a snowball into the long yellow body of the thing, just beneath a window. *Boom.* Curtis hoped no one would think he'd

thrown it, and he prayed that no one had realized it was an alien walking beside him. Then the bus was gone, and the alien asked, "Why can't you play with me?"

"I'm not suppose to," he admitted.

"Rules," it snapped. "What? You always obey rules?"

He didn't want to say, "Yes," but that was the truth. Always.

"Who made the rules? Your folks?"

Mother said that aliens stole the souls of children. The people on TV said it wasn't so, but Mother was quite certain. "If you see one, walk away. Do you hear me, Curtis? If it follows, tell it you don't want to play." She said, "I don't want to have them stealing my boy away. Do as I say and they won't."

"I'll bet it was your mother," said the alien. Aliens had this wicked ability to figure things out. They weren't part of the earth; they were traveling between stars; so far as Curtis was concerned, they were pretty much entitled to be extra smart.

"I bet you're a mamma's boy. I bet so."

Curtis felt sick and small.

"Mamma's boy, mamma's boy! Na, na!"

He started to run, his galoshes like lead.

"Na, na! Na, na!" chanted the alien. "Na, na! Na, na!"

And Curtis knew Mother was right. Aliens were awful. They weren't just ugly, they were mean and rude. This alien threw snowballs into Curtis's back — not throwing them hard, but not soft either — and then it quit chasing him when he got to the shoveled walk leading to the big front doors. Curtis climbed the stairs two at a time and then looked at his watch. The bell hadn't rung! Somehow he'd arrived on time, he realized. Feeling just wonderful, he turned and looked for the alien. There was no one with a blue mask and black gloves; the only kids were those who didn't care if they were late to classes. The alien had vanished, like aliens do, and for some reason, Curtis felt the slightest bit sad.

No one knew where they came from or where they were going. Scientists on TV said the aliens meant no harm, at least so far as they could see. "Ah ha!" said people. "Ah ha! As far as they could see, there wasn't such a thing as these aliens just five years ago. So what the hell do these silly experts know? Nothing. That's all they know."



It was tough for scientists. The aliens didn't talk about themselves, not ever, and if anyone tried studying them they would just evaporate away. The most common guess was that they were traveling through space in an enormous farflung cloud. Each alien was very tiny, in reality — the size of a grain of sand, or smaller — and they built their earth bodies in ways no one could understand. They would drop to the ground and somehow pull atoms and stuff out of the air and dirt. That's what the poor know-nothing scientists guessed, at least. Curtis thought of it being like building with blocks. He didn't understand atoms very well, but blocks made it seem reasonable. A little bit.

More and more aliens were showing up.

They never looked the same twice, but they always wanted to join in with people. Sometimes they got kids to play games that weren't quite forbidden, but that were close to the line. Maybe they were here to look at people and try to understand them. Maybe they were just bored from all their travels in space. Sometimes Curtis got the feeling they were just lonely, and they'd do almost anything to be a part of things.

There was one day a couple of years after that first alien.

Curtis and his four best friends in the world were playing football on the playground beside the school. They had been playing for half an hour when they saw the alien at the edge of the grass. It was tall, sort of, its arms long and its legs short but strong-looking. Its face was kind of chimp-like, only it had funny curling tusks. It wore jeans and a lemon-colored T-shirt and running shoes with the big toes poking through.

Curtis didn't look at it up close. He was afraid to.

Guss, who wasn't afraid of anything or anyone, went to talk to the alien. Curtis and the others watched and waited, tossing the ball back and forth and trying to seem matter-of-fact.

"It wants to play," Guss reported. "It doesn't care what position. It'll even play all-time center." Barney was their all-time center now. He was a fat kid, slow and clumsy, but it was his new ball they were using. "What do you say?" asked Guss. "It might be fun."

Curtis grew cold inside. "I don't think we should," he said. "I can't do it."

"Oh, come on, Curtis. Just this once?"

"If my folks found out, I'd be grounded. For weeks."

"Me too," said fat Barney. "I'd get grounded just for talking with one."

Curtis didn't feel good sharing his excuse with Barney. It took the heart out of it somehow. So he fell back on the old argument. "What if it steals a soul?" he asked. "We're going to be touching it. Tackling it. And everything."

The guys got the same worried expressions on their faces.

"Except it'll be all-time center," Guss interjected. "No one needs to touch it. And they don't steal souls anyway. Not that I've ever seen or heard about."

"What makes you so sure?" Curtis countered.

This was slippery ground, all right. But Guss didn't care and he'd never admit to being scared.

"Okay," he told them. "We make it promise not to steal anything. Right from the first. Then we make it all-time center and nobody has to touch it. Ever."

They took a vote. Barney and Curtis lost. So the alien got waved in, and Curtis told everyone, "I can't play. I'd get canned." Guss asked how his folks would know anything. It was a sensible question that played on his nerves. He had to walk away without saying a word, wishing for them to at least say, "Good-bye." No one did. Barney stayed to play and Curtis sat on the grass not far from where the alien had stood, watching the game and halfway hoping that one of the kids, preferably Guss, would have his soul plucked out of his fearless body.

The alien played center for a few plays, for both sides. It was as slow as Barney, nearly, but it hiked without looking backwards and put the ball into the quarterback's hands with every snap. Guss and Barney were partners. Barney could neither catch nor throw. Guss's face looked red from a distance, and he shouted and stomped about and demanded new teams.

Curtis felt very much alone. It occurred to him that watching was the same as playing, so he turned and started for home. When he was on a high hill he looked back and saw the alien playing quarterback. It threw bullets to Guss, and they moved down the field. Then one time Barney went out for a pass and the alien laid up a cloud that drifted down into his hands, and the two kids covering Guss couldn't get over fast enough. Fat Barney jiggled and jolted his way down the field and scored, and his team came and picked him up and then everyone fell down in a laughing heap.

Well, Mother conceded, soul-robbing was unlikely. But that didn't exclude more subtle and sophisticated means of doing harm. Invoking the oldest of motherly cautions, she told Curtis, "You don't know where they've been." She was a tall woman, massive and volatile. Aliens made her senses reel, and she would have nothing to do with them. "You can't tell me they don't influence your friends. You can't. And I don't mean a good influence, either."

Curtis gave up defending his taboos to others.

Guss and Barney and the rest would mock him. It was a friendly, needling kind of abuse, and it did no good. When an alien arrived, Curtis would leave. And since there were more of them all the time, a good chunk of days saw him home early. "It's not even dinner time," Mother would say. Curtis would explain, hoping that she would see the pain on his face and rescind the orders. But she seemed oblivious to his hurt. "You did the good thing," she claimed. "I'm not having my son corrupted by monsters from Jupiter ..."

They didn't come from Jupiter. No one could say where they called home, if anywhere, but it certainly wasn't nearby.

"Wherever," she snapped. "Oh, Curtis. I see them everywhere. While I'm shopping, while I look out the window ... everywhere! And they make me ill. Don't you see? They're just so wicked looking." She

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Anomaly

(Continued from page 4)

his toys. High normals usually had a problem with boredom.

"The eating disorder dates from infancy. Check with the pediatrician if you don't believe me," I said.

After a moment Carleton sat down in one of the institutional mauve chairs. His fingers tapped the folder absently. "People say you're in love with PLT, Harry. They say it must come from your culture."

I glared at the glaze. A thin gargoyle stared back: "I'm third generation. My mother and father were Lutherans."

"I know."

"Do you imagine I practice Past Life Therapy because of something Hindu in my DNA?"

"Don't get stuffy with me. PLT's fine, but it's not the only therapy we have. Granted, we have an interesting situation here, but I'm not certain your data are valid. In the meantime, you have a patient who needs you. Treat the past life, but don't forget the present."

Bobby was kicking one heel of his sneaker into the linoleum, an expression of other-worldly sorrow on his face. He broke my heart. "I never forgot the present, Dr. Carleton."

I studied the faces of the two QM physicists as they watched the films of Bobby at dinner. Harold Moss, from MIT, winced and looked away from the screen as if we had shown him pornography. In fact, that's what it was. Bobby ate with all the decadence of an aging lecher.

Burton Stengler, professor of applied mediumship from the Kardeckian Institute in Atlanta, watched doggedly, his eyes narrowing in disgust.

Carleton turned the film off just after the denouement when Bobby vomited out the contents of his engorged stomach, paused for a moment, and then calmly began to eat again.

"Just so you see what the problem is," I told them. "Some background."

The ascetic Stengler nervously ran a finger along his upper lip. The rotund Moss seemed more than simply nervous, and I wondered if the film had given him the impetus to begin a diet.

Then Carleton slipped the July 21 tape into the VCR. The monitor lit up.

I was looking at myself: a graying Indian with hollow, dark eyes and rumpled lab coat. Bobby sat across from me, pumped full of Thanapeline, his head lolling on his neck.

"Quero um cigarro," he muttered.

Reaching into my pocket, I got him one, lit it, and passed it across. He took it, pressing the filter between two fingers. After breathing in a deep drag of smoke, he plucked at his tongue. Gilberto Soares would be a poor man, and he would be used to rolling his own.

Bobby regarded me, his eyes slit and tired from the drug. "Brigado."

Moss turned from the screen to me. "Do you speak Portuguese?" he asked hopefully.

"Direct Translation Feed," Carleton answered.

"Notice the pink button on Dr. Patel's right ear."

On the monitor the dot of pink erupted from my brown skin like an infection. The Translation Receivers, like Band-Aids, were advertised as being "flesh-colored." The pink would have clashed with no one else in the room but me and the artificially tanned Dr. Stengler.

Looking disappointed, Dr. Moss turned away.

"Where do you live, Gilberto?" my image asked. Because of Bobby, Soares understood English. He could speak English, too, when he wanted. But Soares would be a difficult, a stubborn, man. After knowing the easily intimidated boy, that cheered me. I loved Bobby for his gentleness, but gentleness is a hard thing to bear. Its burden was heavy on Bobby, and it weighed down the people around him. Sometimes they hated him for that.

"Aqui."

"And where is that?"

Bobby, his face drawn up into an expression of amusement that looked out of place on a child, said, "Aqui, po Manaus." Then he asked me in that crude Portuguese of his if I didn't know where I was.

"Quero uma cerveja."

"I don't have a beer. Would you like a Coke?"

"Nao." At this point he stubbed his cigarette out in the ashtray and crossed his arms. His movements were clumsy.

It was coming. I knew it was coming. I'd seen the tape dozens of times. My hands dug into the armrests of my chair. On the monitor a placid, innocent me went on, a smile of encouragement on my face.

"Okay, Gilberto. I'm going to take you forward five years. Five years. Tell me what you see."

Why hadn't I noticed the look on Bobby's face? On the monitor I could see it so clearly: the way the eyes narrowed, not from sleepiness but from pain; the way the mouth grimaced as if he had tasted something spoiled.

"Frio," he said.

"What's cold?"

"Estou com frio," Bobby's oversized body was trembling in its oversized knit shirt. Ashamed of his belly, he hated clothes that fit him. An active ten-year-old, he hated long sleeves.

"Would you like for me to turn the air conditioning down?"

A cry came from him, wrenched from his beefy chest. "Ai. Jesus! Jesus! O céu está quebrado!"

On the monitor my face showed alarm. I leaned forward, grasping his hand. He pulled away with such force that my arm recoiled like a spring. "What do you mean, 'the sky is broken'? Gilberto? What is it?"

"O céu. O céu...."

The sky.

His voice went high, shattering like glass on the peak of his terror. "O céu está preto!"

"The sky is black? Is it a storm, Gilberto? A bad storm?"

Bobby's eyes turned inward to the bleak landscape only he could see. "O céu está preto e neve cai no mato."

"What?" I asked with disbelief. "What did you say?"

"O neve." His eyes seemed blind. "O neve cai no mato."

The tape ended.

Carleton switched on the ceiling lights. Blinking, Moss and Stengler turned towards me. "What was it?" Stengler asked.

I relaxed my grip on the arms of my chair. "Snow," I said. My hands had cramped into claws. "Snow fell in the jungle."

Bobby watched as I shaved his ankle. "I don't want to," he said.

Taking up the Thanapeline pump, I attached it to his leg. "It's something that they have to do, Bobby," I explained without looking up. I knew his face too well. I knew what fear looked like in it.

"Why do you always put it there?"

I began to tape the pump to his leg before answering. "So you won't snatch it out. The ankle is harder to get to. Sometimes things get pretty hectic, you know."

He knew.

"It scares me to go back."

"I'm sorry." Therapy, for Bobby, appeared to have backfired. He was eating more and eating faster, driven by urgency. At age fifty-three, Soares would die of starvation and be buried in the jungle's white, cold tomb.

"What you see when you go back is very important, Bobby. It's something we don't understand. Maybe if we understand it, we can prevent it from happening."

"But I'll die, anyway," he said.

I looked at him then. He was somber as an adult. The Thanapeline's residual effect confused sexes sometimes. Sometimes confused ages. I'd always considered that a side-effect I could live with. Now I wasn't so sure. "We all die," I told him. "Past Life Therapy helps you deal with that."

"But I'm not remembering a past life, am I?"

I busied myself with the tape. Over, under. Over, under. I ran my hand across the bulge of the pump to see that it was secure. "No. We don't think you're remembering a past life."

"I don't like those men."

"I'll be in there with you," I said as I helped him up. "Just in case you need me."

He clung to me, a hot, fleshy bulk that was part child, part dying man. He was too heavy to carry. Taking my hand he walked down the long hall.

"Hello, Bobby," Moss said. The researcher looked as if he wasn't sure whether or not to shake hands. In the end he didn't. Most adults have difficulties relating to children. Stengler was worse than Moss, and Moss at best was awkward. At last he motioned the boy to a chair, deftly wrapped a bit of rubber tubing on Bobby's upper arm, and tapped his forefinger on a likely vein.

Bobby looked up at me, panicked.

"I see no reason for you to stay, Dr. Patel," Stengler said. He was calibrating a hand-held voice stress analyzer.

"Bobby's asked me to."

Stengler glanced at Moss. "Might mess up the data," Stengler said. "Eye contact. Maybe some sort of gesture code."

Moss gauged Bobby's pallid face. "He could sit behind him. I don't see any problem with that."

I drew a chair up behind Bobby's back. He tried to turn around to watch me, but Moss caught his attention.

"You'll have to prevent yourself from turning around and watching Dr. Patel, Bobby. Otherwise we're going to have to ask him to leave the room, okay? We're going to take some blood now." Moss glanced past Bobby to me. "No tranquilizers?"

"No."

Some of the psychics I work with say they see auras. I've never seen one, but, my shoulder to his back, I imagined I could feel the throbbing terror of Bobby's.

Moss was skilled with the needle. A moment later he tagged the specimen and picked up some leads. "You've seen these, haven't you?" Moss asked Bobby.

Bobby nodded wordlessly.

"Well, we're going to attach these to your head. They don't hurt. But they'll show us what your brain is doing. Okay?" Without waiting for permission, Moss attached the wires. Pity for Bobby welled in my throat and I swallowed it down. Pity, I have discovered, has the flavor of stale coffee and shame.

When Moss was finished, he stood back.

"Your name, please?" Stengler asked, looking at the voice stress analyzer rather than at Bobby's face. I wondered if the researcher was as aloof as he seemed or if Bobby frightened him. Bobby frightened a lot of people.

"Your name?" Stengler repeated tersely when Bobby didn't reply.

"Wait a minute," I said. "He didn't know you were addressing him. You've hardly spoken to him, you know. He's frightened."

"Dr. Patel, we'd appreciate it if you didn't speak. Your role here is that of observer only. Bobby. We're going to ask you some questions, all right? And you'll answer as completely and as honestly as possible. Your name is?"

"Robert Stanley Harding," Bobby whispered.

Stengler said, "Right. A positive. And Bobby. Have you ever heard or read about nuclear winter?"

"What?" Bobby asked. Even without the analyzer I could hear the thin desperation in the child's voice.

Moss broke in. "Did Dr. Patel mention nuclear winter, Bobby?"

"Nuh uh. I don't even know what that is."

"A simple yes or no, please," Stengler told him.

"No, sir."

The interrogation went on for thirty minutes. Stengler finally sat back in his chair, putting the stress analyzer down. "We've found the parents," he told me.

I looked at him.

"Gilberto Soares gives the names of his parents as Edson Flavio Soares and Tonya Justina Boas. We found them in Manaus. They're married, and Mrs.



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Soares is pregnant. If this is a hoax, it's an elaborate one."

I could feel my chest tighten. "Not in front of the boy," I said.

"What?" Stengler's embryonic smile died. He looked confused.

Moss caught on. Chastened, he tapped Stengler on the shoulder. "Save it, Burton. Later. Dr. Patel, perhaps you could induce trance now."

I nodded, touched Bobby on the shoulder and spoke the inducer, "Touchdown." The boy's head dropped to his chest. He was into a partial trance, and I was relieved. In trance, I felt, no one could hurt him. No one but me. And I only hurt him to help him. I hurt him in style.

Moss checked the monitor. "Alpha. Some beta spikes." He picked up his translation receiver and screwed it into his ear.

Taking the pump control from my pocket. I thumbed the button. In his partial trance, Bobby snickered.

"Deep alpha," Moss said. "A few theta dips. God, that was quick. The Thanapeline?"

I nodded. When I spoke now, it would be only to Bobby.

"Take him to age fifty-three."

Talking into his ear, softly enough not to alarm him, but loudly enough to be caught on Moss's tape, I took him back. I saw when it happened. He groaned. Tears started up in his eyes.

"There's another person here, Gilberto," I told him. "He wants to talk with you. His name is Dr. Moss. Do you understand?"

The tears overbalanced and spilled down his cheeks as he nodded. I motioned to Moss to begin the questions.

"Where are you?" Moss asked.

Bobby squirmed in his chair, sending the brain wave monitor into spasms.

"Are you in Manaus?" Moss went on when Bobby didn't reply.

"Ah..." Bobby spoke from a slack mouth.

"What's happening in Manaus, Gilberto? Can you tell us?"

Bobby's back stiffened as he became more agitated. I checked the pump control uselessly, wondering if I should stop the questioning. "Ah..."

"Tell us, please."

"Ah..." Bobby said. "Ah-mericano?"

"Yes," Moss said. "I'm an American."

The move was so sudden it caught Stengler and Moss off-guard. Bobby leaped across the table at them, hands out, snarling. The voice stress analyzer dropped from Stengler's hand and shattered with a loud finality on the floor.

"Assassinos!" Bobby screamed. He caught the front of Moss' lab coat in his hands and clawed at the researcher's face. "*Filho da puta! Assassinos!*"

"Jesus!" Moss cried. "Get him off me!" His face was scored in a dozen places and blood welled angrily from the wounds. His hands were in front of him, shoving at, not beating, the boy. His defense was that of a civilized man to an uncivilized small animal.

I punched the control button so hard I drove it permanently into its housing.

Grabbing Bobby around his thick waist, I pulled him from Moss. Bobby was sobbing. "*Mataran a gente,*" he said as he pushed his face into a hiding place at my shoulder. The Thanapeline was wearing off, and I wasn't certain whether it was Gilberto who was crying or Bobby. "*Os Americanos. Mataran a gente,*" he said.

Moss was shaken. He wiped blood from his face. But it was Stengler, oddly enough, who was angry. "It wouldn't be the Americans. It'd be the Russians. He doesn't know."

I cradled the boy, my hand moving across the back of his head, plucking away the wire leads angrily. "He knows. He lived through it."

"Bullshit," Stengler spat. "He was a peasant living on the edge of the Amazon jungle. He couldn't know anything."

I pried the tape from the pump and tugged it out. A drop of blood came with it. "Sorry," I whispered to Bobby. "I'm sorry." I was sorry for everything, for the bead of red on the shaved ankle, for the way the day had gone, for the extinction we faced.

When he was quiet, when he was Bobby again, I took him down the hall to his room and gave him a Snickers and a Valium, two single-strand safety lines for a small falling boy.

*** **

In the room was the vibration of a prior argument. Stengler was fitting the black plastic shards of his voice stress analyzer together as if it were a jigsaw puzzle of doom. Moss, stained handkerchief in hand, was dabbing aimlessly at his cheeks. They both looked up at me when I entered.

"I should get you some antiseptic for that," I told Moss. My words seemed to go out from my mouth a little ways and then dissipate in the rarefied tension.

"We don't have time," Stengler said.

I glanced at Moss. Moss had an odd grin. Apparently he knew Stengler well enough to find his rudeness amusing. "I'm all right," he told me softly. "It's nothing, really. How is the boy?"

There is a moment in relationships when love or hate comes in a flash of emotional knowledge. Such feelings are common to me. But not so common that their fury doesn't leave me shaken. I had twin shocks then, one after the other: liking for Moss; hatred for Stengler.

Because I felt that sudden kinship with Moss, I lied. "He's fine."

"Finding his parents complicates things," Stengler said as he fit a piece of plastic that looked like an L onto a piece that looked like a bird.

"Tonya's pregnant. What happens when Gilberto's born?" Even though I knew the inevitable, I asked, anyway, wanting to get the truth out. The question had the same pain-pleasure syndrome as a lanced boil.

"Maybe nothing," Stengler said. "It's my theory that this soul comes from an alternate universe. After all, if no life was left on Earth, where would those souls go who needed further incarnations? That pro-

blem would have to be addressed, and nothing in Kardeckian Theory allows for it."

Moss was regarding Stengler thoughtfully. "I'm not a Kardeckian. I'm just a physicist who got in this through the quantum theory back door. Things don't fit as neatly for me as they do for Burton. I'm not sure what reality is." His voice lowered and he looked at me. "And, considering the dichotomy inherent in clairvoyance, I'm not sure how time works, either."

"So." I paused, bathed in the fearful uncertainty of Moss's gaze. "He might really be remembering a future life. A life where, in fifty-three years, the sky darkens and it snows in the jungle."

"Right," Moss told me.

"It's highly doubtful," Stengler said. He relaxed his grip on the voice stress analyzer. The pieces fell away in his hands and he looked down at them in surprise.

Mrs. Harding had had her irises dyed an iridescent shade of blue. A flat, cobalt flat gem was nestled professionally into the skin at the edge of her cheek. The effect was less sensual than disturbing.

"I'm sorry you feel this way," I said lamely, turning from that electric blue stare to the unaltered hazel one of Mr. Harding.

Harding crushed the tabloid in his oversized hand. It splintered, oozing liquid crystal fluid on the table. "A freak. They call him a freak."

"Not a freak," I told him. I had read the article myself. "Simply a boy who can see the future."

Mr. Harding got up from the white wrought-iron ice cream table and paced the sunlit patio. The furniture, baroque in its pleasant fussiness, was a jarring note to the conversation. I felt I was having an argument in a nursery. "A freak," he said.

"That is your word, Mr. Harding," I said.

He turned on me, an athletic Doberman guarding his own sense of propriety. "Who leaked this!" he shouted.

"I don't know." Turning from the angry father, I tried to enlist the mother's help. Her eerie eyes were disturbing.

"We need to take Bobby away," she said.

I flung my pleading hands across the glass-topped table. "You can't do that. Bobby's at a very dangerous stage in his treatment. He needs to be watched every hour of every day. He eats too much, and he eats too fast. Someone has to be with him."

"You made him this way," Mr. Harding said. "You filled his mind up with all this dying shit."

"He remembers a life as Gilberto Soares. I can't help that he does." My voice shook. I couldn't help that, either.

"Reincarnation's a crock," he told me.

"How do you refute the Holbeck case? All the controls that were met? How do you refute that?"

He lifted one corner of his mouth in a sneer. With his bland, jogger's face it looked inappropriate. "I don't have to refute it. I just don't believe it."

There is, I've discovered, no argument against ignorance. "Please, Mrs. Harding," I said as I turned back to her. "Please keep him here. Taking him will be so dangerous."

Those neon-blue eyes dropped. "We have a household servo. It will take care of him."

"A robot?" I asked in shock. "You can't leave him with a robot. He needs the hospital. He needs me."

"No, he doesn't," Mr. Harding snarled. "You're sick, Patel. A robot isn't perfect, but at least it won't be in love with death."

It was no use. I felt I was caught in a surge of destiny. Deep inside the coils of my DNA, perhaps there is something left that is Hindu.

"Yes," I said. "You're right. A robot is in love with nothing."

Six months later Moss called to tell me Tonya Soares had had her baby. It was a boy, and they named him Gilberto. I put in a call to the Hardings again. They were back from Australia, apparently. Mr. Harding answered the video phone.

"This is Dr. Patel," I said. "May I speak to Bobby?"

He looked at me. There was a long silence. Through the speaker I could pick up the light whisper of Harding's breath.

"Is Bobby there? I need to speak to him. You can watch and listen in, if you like."

"What do you want?" he finally asked. His voice sounded hollow. It clashed with his new tan, his palpable aura of good health.

"I just want to talk to Bobby, please. Something has come up. I want to see if he's all right."

I'm sure it was anxiety that caused it. At least I'm almost sure. The right side of his mouth lifted in a smile that looked, through the phone monitor, victorious. "Bobby's dead."

I didn't speak.

Harding went on. "He choked to death about a month ago. The servo was with him. If you believe in that superstitious shit about an afterlife, then maybe he's happier. I don't know. But I'd ask you not to call again and bother my wife. We're in mourning."

"You bastard," I said.

He was stupid enough to look astonished. "What did you say?"

"You bastard. How many weeks did you have to leave him alone and unloved before he obliged you by dying?"

His face lost its color. Even wealthy tans fade in the glare of insight. "I don't have to listen to this," he told me as his hand moved to the right.

The screen went dark. The silent background of the phone changed to an angry buzz.

I am so afraid.

In the slanted afternoon sunlight of my room, I close my eyes and can see it. Over the canopy of trees in the jungle the sky grows dark. The toucans hush. The *sagui* monkey lifts its brown-masked, curious face upwards. On the dim forest floor the iguana scurries to shelter, the tapir curls to sleep.

A freezing wind whips from the north, carrying its load of poisoned snow into a fragile, warm land. It dusts bananas and palms. An orchid's cupped leaves fill with white. Looking out at it for the very first time, this shrouded surprise must seem beautiful. □



Arachne

By Elissa Malcohn

Art by Pat Morrissey

Arachne scuttled up her web to repose under a canopy of dead leaf. A fly hung motionless below her, one she had fought patiently, waiting and vigilant for signs of struggle. A large catch, it had jerked and twitched almost out of her web, tearing gluey strands. Her poison had been all but ineffective.

She had woven in and out like a boxer, wrapping more silk around the body and dodging its frenzied twists. A fly draws great strength from terror. It had taken her lifetimes, it seemed, to subdue this one. A silk cocoon preserved it now, rendering it anonymous.

Between panes of storm glass in a south-facing window, Arachne hung suspended, her legs curled gracefully up and inward. Her eight eyes turned in toward dreams. The leaf she had dragged for half a day and secured above her shielded her from strong sunlight as she slept, hiding her from marauding wasps. Heat eddied about, trapped in the window.

She awoke in a hammock in an herb garden. Arachne opened her two eyes and started. Her arms grabbed the sides of the hammock and it swung wildly, and she shifted her body weight to still it. Yesterday she had balanced herself on a thin strand as naturally as breathing. Today tall spires of grass had turned into a wispy carpet beneath her. The hammock around her was a white weave and her fingers tangled nervously between its knots.

She lifted her arms and looked at her hands, the clouds beyond them puffy as newly-shorn wool. *Human.* Her thick raven hair contrasted with the macrame around her shoulders. Her skin glowed with bronze radiance; high cheekbones rested above an aquiline nose. Full lips parted where once there were mandibles and chelicerae with fangs. Her voice had deepened but held no less awe, and indeed more, than when she'd been a maiden in Hypaepa before her first transformation. "*Human...*"

Arachne slid carefully from the hammock, gathered her white gown around her, and surveyed the garden. A cottage of brick and stone stood in the distance.

Was it a dream? Is this still a Lydian city; did Athens only knock me senseless with her weaving shuttle? What place is this? She studied the veins risen on the backs of her hands. *No mere dream. I've aged.*

She trotted to the cottage, ungainly at first. Then she grew accustomed to the feel of two rather than eight legs in motion, to arms swinging through air. Climbing three porch steps, she knocked on the door.

A silver-haired woman, tall and ramrod straight, answered. Arachne stood nervously at the door, bunching her robe in her fists. She looked up at a seamed face and eyes with crow's feet radiating like sunbursts, then took in the plain gray sweatshirt and cotton pants.

Ice-blue eyes gazed steadily into Arachne's dark brown. "Yes?"

"Excuse me — I was wondering —" What to say? I found myself in your hammock and I don't know how; I used to be a spider. "I'm — lost," Arachne stammered. "I was wondering if I could just sit down for a minute and get my bearings. A glass of water. If it's not too much trouble."

"If it was too much trouble I'd have booted you off my porch." The woman motioned her in. "Sit down on the couch inside; there's cider." Her lips curled into the slightest of smiles. "Unless of course you'd like something stronger."

Arachne followed her inside uncertainly, and followed her pointing hand to a den. Surrounded by walls of dark wood grain, she let her gaze wander. Her hand rested on the plastic casing of a television set and she squatted to run her fingertips over its blank screen. On a coffee table by the couch there was a pushbutton phone. Dream images. She knew what they were and how they worked. Now that she had seen them, it was as though the gods had filled her with knowledge awaiting only the proper cues for its release.

She looked to her left, toward the brick fireplace. On its mantle there sat a bronze helmet engraved with ram's heads, and a stuffed owl beside it. The helmet was Pallas Athene's, the owl her sacred creature. Arachne stared back at the kitchen and tried to still her trembling.

Her host emerged with a silver tray holding two pitchers and two chalices and set it down on the coffee table. She poured apple cider into one chalice and handed it to Arachne. As she poured the other her den filled with the smells of honey, juices, and spice fermented to a heady strength.

"I'd offer you ambrosia, but that's a god's drink," the woman said plainly. "Sit."

Arachne sat.

Athene sat crosslegged opposite Arachne on the couch and rested her elbows on her knees. "I've deprived you of a hard-won fly," she continued. "I hope this cider is an acceptable substitute. As for being lost, you are in twentieth-century Massachusetts,

in the New World. Does that ring a bell?"

Arachne whispered, "It does now."

"Good."

"You brought me back."

"Does that surprise you?" Athene raised her eyebrows, and Arachne caught a glint in her eyes that reflected a younger goddess resplendent in armor. One who had perfected her youthful beauty as assiduously as she'd honed her skills. "I am in need of a weaver of your rare talents." The goddess lifted her ambrosia in tribute, with a wink, and sipped.

Arachne barked a laugh. "The last time I wove for you as a human, you turned me to spider."

"The last time you wove for me, you squirt, you escaped my wrath by hanging yourself and then I turned you to spider. There's a difference. A live spider is of more use to me than a dead girl." Athene gazed at the wall behind Arachne and its wood grain began to warp under her scrutiny. The lines in the wood straightened into tight, parallel strands.

Arachne followed Athene's gaze and swung around on the couch. A golden glow enveloped the wood. A bolt of light shot into the den from the kitchen window and shattered into prisms. Sunbeams breached every window and streamed in, accentuating angle and contrast. Shadows vanished; even the floor underneath the couch lay illuminated. Beams of individual wavelengths looped and spun against the wall, zigzagging with great speed. Two wefts merged with the wood grain and thickened from the bottom up. One formed a border of olives; the other of flowers and ivy.

From behind her, Arachne heard the goddess murmur, "I'm also quite good at restoration...."

Arachne grew dizzy watching twin oscillations of light, colors blending finely as royal Tyrian purple metamorphosed across the visible spectrum. To the left lay Athene's tapestry. Scenes unfolded, for a second time, of the goddess's contest with Poseidon for her city of Athens, and of Cecrops, its first king. Of mortal trials emblazoned in the weaving's four corners. To the right there spun Arachne's work. She remembered her crafting hands, fingers deftly weaving scenes of Zeus cavorting as bull, as shower of gold, as swan with mortal maidens. Scenes of Divine follies. She had been a girl of poor parentage and no family to speak of, who had dared to challenge the Goddess of Wisdom at weaving. They had set up opposing looms under the wide eyes of nymphs and Thracian women.

Clouds spun, drawn into threads arcing over the women's heads. Arachne looked up, gazing into lines fine as silk that sped into the warp on the wall. Deep in her belly she felt the stirring of phantom silk glands, the exhilarating pull of her issue through six spinnerets and out of her body, her leaps across chasms as she left a guy line behind her, eight legs poised and ready to grasp...

Without thinking she rose from the couch and plunged her fingers into the beams above her. Her legs twitched as she tried to reach them to weave; she lost her balance and fell back into the couch's plush upholstery.

The intense light vanished as quickly as it had come. The room changed once more, softening as

contrasts faded. Shadows gained entrance into their accustomed places. The two tapestries, woolen and heavy, hung on the wall where they had formed, as fresh as the day they were first made.

Sprawled and panting, Arachne blinked. She flexed her fingers. Athene eyed her curiously. Even in sweats, the goddess's regal posture was commanding, a beacon of calm by Arachne's disarray.

"For a moment —" Arachne panted. "For a moment, I was back there."

"I know."

"It was —" *Exhilarating*. Arachne shook the thought from her head. *But no, it was —* She knotted her fingers together.

"You don't have to tell me," Athene replied softly. "That was a rather small test. You've passed it well."

Arachne straightened her limbs and drew her gown around her.

"You've worn the bodies of many spiders over the millennia. They've taught you."

Arachne glanced nervously about her, searching for a loom, a spinning wheel. Her fingers ached to weave. Her skill was not a matter of pride now, but an addiction. Spiders given insects without the need to catch them still spin their webs. They ignore the vibrations of trapped food. They build their webs, dismantle them, build them again. *It was —* Breathing hard, Arachne retraced her steps, tried to remember if there was a loom in the kitchen. Weave, or die. *It was — everything.*

"Have you a loom?"

"Nonsense," the goddess said sharply. "This is a modern house, Arachne. This is the twentieth century." Eyes of ice, her face taut and lined as a matriarch's.

Athene had led the disoriented woman to a guest room and put her to bed. Now she looked past the dormers of her bedroom and studied the heavens. *First there was Chaos...* Old god, her people's first Divinity. "We have a matter larger even than you," she whispered into the darkness. Arachne, that vain, stupid girl, had lasted from spider's life to spider's life and grown. Now returned, a woman with a spider's knowledge, Arachne possessed more than just a weaver's instinct. So Athene hoped.

She found herself wondering what the other Arachnes were like. Were some of them male? Were some of them still spiders, or spider-equivalents? Athene had no way of knowing. This Universe, this Chaos, was a puddle, and she was the goddess of a puddle. Eons ago Athene believed this Chaos was all there was beyond the Earth and Planets, just as the girl Arachne had believed in nothing beyond that exotic end of the world called Hyperborea. And she had been self-educated. There had been villagers in her small town of Hypaepa who believed there was nothing beyond Hypaepa....

As Adam and Eve were to humans, so were Erebus and Nyx to those people known as Olympians. Eve was just as much myth — and a human woman as well, placed in Africa approximately 200,000 years ago. What the human Arachne shared with twentieth-century peoples was a speck of mitochondrial

DNA, passed on only in the egg and inherited by all humans from the same woman.

Pallas Athene also possessed a speck of DNA, one leading to the Olympians' common ancestor — a peer of Eve's perhaps. While Eve's people had a proclivity for reproduction, Nyx's descendants possessed other means, evolving under different rules. They did not aim for numbers but for legend. Interbreeding with humans added numbers to human legend and kept the Olympian population small.

While descendants common to both people possessed variation in their DNA strain, such variation had been labeled a result of the "mutation rate" in a modern people unaccustomed to recognizing their ancient gods as co-inheritors of the planet.

Mathematics and physics had bridged in the modern world to yield a theoretical knowledge of ten dimensions. Physicists, constrained by the dimensions around them, tried to reduce those ten to the four they knew of: length, width, height, and time. Blinding themselves. Even now Chaos raced outward, like pursuing like, to the meeting of its counterparts at a common focus: Chaos multiplied.

Funny that I am not curious about the other Athenes. She smiled to herself. She had worn the masks of beggar, warrior, crone, maiden, shepherd boy. In and of herself, she had been a multiplicity of Athenes, able to take any form she desired. Able to become all possible players in appearance, she had not thought her own counterparts to be any different from herself.

Provincial fool — what if you'd sprung from Dionysus in another world, your chromosomes steeped in wine? What sort of drunken wisdom would you have imparted then? Perhaps in another universe the Goddess of Wisdom was a mere concept, a mathematical theory. Perhaps the sperm carried mitochondrial lineage, to make her bursting from Zeus a natural act rather than one requiring Rhea's genetic soup smuggled into a goblet of ambrosia. Or perhaps her counterpart had merely sprung full-grown from particles colliding in a cyclotron.

The Olympians, despite their godlike abilities, did not possess the required knowledge that would untangle the multiplicity of Chaos when the universes met. For that reason, Athene brought her challenger in weaving back into human form. Of all creatures, spiders that are orb weavers move to the beginning from the end. They begin their webs at the outside edge, knowing to use all their silk, no more and no less, and knowing their reserves before they start to spin. They are fully aware of the mass they have available to weave. The boundary of the web is woven first; then comes the movement inward to the center, the focus. A spider's first instinct is to create the perimeter while having advance knowledge of the finished product's shape and size. In weaving, the end and not the beginning is the *fait accompli*.

Like a web, a universe is defined by its size, and mass.

We are at the perimeter of a larger space, Athene mused, and we are expanding toward its center. What's more, the discoverers of the ten dimensions had also included, in their Theory of Everything, the

fundamental building blocks of matter and energy and named them:

Strings.

If Arachne was worthy, she, like her counterparts, would not only be the supreme weaver. She would become the supreme Creatrice. Squinting into the night, Pallas Athene stood calmly with the grace of Wisdom, while the silver hairs on the back of her ivory neck began to stand.

"Get up!"

Arachne's face lay partially obscured under the fringe from a blanket. Athene grabbed a corner with one hand and whipped her cover off the bed.

"Bitch!" Arachne spouted, fully awake now and curled in a fetal position to conserve her body warmth. Cold morning air hit her skin under a thin nightgown. Shivering, she rolled out of bed. "Damn it, don't you tap mortals on the shoulder?" She groped for her robe. "Or send the smells of breakfast into their nostrils, or send a waking dream of Divine import?"

"Give me that." Athene grabbed the robe from her. The crone was dressed in a turtleneck and slacks. "Dreams of Divine import; did you think I was here to serve you? I brought you back for a reason and *not* the other way around." Bluejeans and a cable sweater appeared in a swirl of mist and settled gently on the bed. "Wear these."

Arachne dressed quickly and followed Athene into the kitchen. Pancakes flipped themselves on a griddle. As Arachne sat gingerly at the kitchen table, the Olympian pulled a plastic carton of apple cider and an unmarked quart container from an old Frigidaire in the corner. "Or would you prefer orange juice?" she asked, setting goblets on the table.

"Fine," Arachne said numbly.

The rose tint of the apple carton flashed a bright orange with a corresponding change in fluid and text. This simple play with matter and energy was still godlike to Arachne. She would learn to weave much finer stuff.

As Arachne helped herself to juice, Athene poured ambrosia into her own goblet. The ambrosia heated in the cup and sent tendrils of smoke upward as Athene returned the unmarked container to the refrigerator. Plates flew from the cupboard to the stove as pancakes leapt up in mid-flip and landed in a stack on each. The plates, like discs, gyrated to the table.

"Did you bring me back to show me parlor tricks?" Arachne picked listlessly at her food. "Why am I here?"

"You are here to understand the parlor tricks. And you had better eat, because after you've finished I want you to chop firewood. We may get frost tonight." Athene spoke with her mouth full, gesturing with her fork. Arachne fixed her with an incredulous stare. "You'll find an ax in the shed out back."

When they were finished, Athene took their dishes and flung them, spinning, toward the sink. The dishes met briefly, edges passing through each other, transparent. Where they met, a shaft of light speared upward and dispersed, and the dishes vanished before colliding with the faucets. Arachne shook her head and turned away, heading toward the door.

"By the way," Athene shouted after her, "I do tap mortals on the shoulder when I wish to wake them. How many spiders have you lived? What makes you think you're a goddamn mortal?"

Arachne spluttered curses older than the New World as she strode to the shed where piles of wood awaited her. Pausing at the door's rusted hinges, she leaned against rough wood beams and tilted her head up to the sun.

She had been a silver argiope, silver-haired and spotted, her legs banded with black. How many lifetimes ago? She'd spun a new web nightly, her old one eaten, a spiral with zigzagged cross-strands. She had known self-sufficiency for centuries on centuries, taking the forms of myriad species of spider. Hatching with other spiderlings by the hundreds, she'd left a desiccated egg sac and never looked back. She had begun to build small webs. She increased her silk glands' capacity to produce more by draining them, and her webs became larger as she aged. Mandalas all, glaucy strands shimmering in the light, a pinwheel of delicacy with unmatched resilience.

She remembered the pull, that core of her being liquefied and then drawn solid through her and out. She recalled her spider's belly yielding, yielding, swollen with warp and weft. One silk for radii and another for the frame. She had knotted her world around her time and time again.

A male had grown to mate with her. He had spun a small web on the outskirts of hers and then twitched hers, asking to approach in safety. Legs against legs he had entered her, washing his seed over her storehouse of eggs. Spilling his body into her as surely as she'd spilled her body of weave out into the world. And she, spilling again, pushed her egg sac from her. Drained, the energy to replenish herself lagged, taken by her eggs and the hundreds of spiderlings curled like homunculi waiting to hatch. They had taken her mate's energy as well, feeding from the body she had eaten, after she had opened her chelicerae and bitten off his head. She had grown weak, greeting the tang of death, hanging — for a moment — on a knot of rope, a girl dangling before an angry goddess. Eons ago the girl's head had shrunk as her belly bulged, her arms grown inward and fingers lengthened. Branded into primeval memory, this image faded into death, as surely as her spider's death faded the moment she pressed her new spiderling's body against the edge of her egg, and burst it....

Arachne caressed her stomach with her hand. The other hand, resting near the hinges of the door, felt a gentle prodding, a sensation moving lightly from finger to finger.

A small spider negotiated its way across the wrinkles of her skin, leaving strands between her splayed fingers. She removed her hand from the side of the shed and watched it move forward and backtrack, over and under with singularity of purpose. The nerves in her skin cells fired, tickled by the pattern of scrambling legs. She watched the spider as it webbed her hand, felt tears leave her eyes and course down her cheeks, dropping down toward dead leaves on the ground. Her chest began to heave as she

cried openly, sobbing. *Communion*. The Universe was cupping her in its hand while inside, Athene taunted her. Was she loved or abandoned? Why was she here? Why was she *human*?

The spider dropped from her, spinning a gey line as it floated gently to the spot where her tears had passed into the soil. She watched it climb across blades of grass.

The web in her hand glistened. She wiggled her fingers, feeling the pull of silky tethers. She placed her fingers in her mouth, slipping her tongue under the sections of web and drawing it into her. *Keep your sour ambrosia*. She swallowed, and stepped into the shed, ready to chop wood.

Stoking the hearth fire at twilight, Athene listened to the sound of hammering outside and smiled to herself. Slender logs and flat pieces suitable for a frame had lain on one of the woodpiles. Arachne had spent the day in Athene's garden, smoothing and sanding branches from which to make rod and heddle sticks, and chipping a flat piece to serve as the batten for her loom. Self-sufficiency, once learned, is not easily forgotten — even when one changes form.

Wool had miraculously appeared in the closets. Reclining in the den, Athene tuned her mind to a force unnamed by humans, spying with a channel of Sight from where she sat on Arachne's activities in the guest bedroom. The other woman had driven nails into the frame and was dressing her functional if primitive loom. All Arachne needed to do now was spin as a human and let her instincts meld.

There was a knock on her door. Athene projected her voice toward the transom and called, "Who is it?"

"Courier."

"Oh, it's you." Athene snuggled into the couch and produced a mirror, angling it toward the kitchen until she saw her door reflected. She called into the mirror, "I'm old and creaky, Hermes, and I've got a dandy fire roaring in here. I'm not getting up off this couch; come in through the mirror." As she reached into the reflection, her hand distorted into a tiny counterpart that grasped the doorknob and turned. She opened the door and Hermes's small image grinned at her.

"Punctual as a returning infection," she muttered. She lowered the mirror to the floor. Hermes stepped through, growing to full size as he rose.

"Take care you don't step on the glass; it's seven years bad luck."

He buoyed up, wingtip shoes beating feathers at his heels. "Better?" Landing on Athene's rug, he made a gallant bow, reached for the mirror and returned it. He kissed her on the cheek. "It's toasty in here. You stoke a good fire, Gramma."

She snorted. "I see you're still wearing your youth like a proper delinquent."

Hermes threw back his head and laughed, then dropped onto the couch and crossed his ankles on top of the coffee table. He stretched luxuriantly and batted his long eyelashes at his half-sister. "Youthful androgyny is in vogue, dear. I don't look good in gray; you, however," he added quickly, "add — how you say? — elegance to the art of wrinkles. Your face is a manifold of beauty...a road map to the soul —"

"Who's here?" Arachne stood at the doorway. She stared openly at the curly-haired man, then at his caduceus that leaned against the side of the couch.

Hermes leapt off the couch and strode to meet her. "I don't believe we've been formally introduced. I'm the god of vagabonds, rogues and thieves." His hand lay outstretched. "And travelers, science, and messages between the worlds, of which there have lately been a plague."

"I am honored, Hermes; I've only heard of you until now." Arachne shook his hand warmly, and felt herself falling into his emerald green eyes. "A plague of worlds? Or a plague of messages?"

"Yes." He kissed her hand. "The more worlds there are, the more messages there are. I have connections, of course."

"Can you tell me why I'm here?" Arachne asked.

"Isn't it obvious? You are here to weave."

"It's not so obvious to me; I had to make my own loom."

"Ah, yes." Hermes looked pensive. "And your own wool, too?"

Arachne glanced at Athene. Athene said, "I always stockpile wool in my closets. I hate to think of all those moths going hungry."

"You see —" Hermes lifted Arachne's chin with his hand, his lips hovering near her own. "I say I have connections. But you make them."

Arachne shrugged. "With strings, yes."

"Precisely!" Lips met lips and Arachne felt a stirring in her abdomen as Hermes took her into his arms.

She heard his voice in her mind: *What would you do if you had glands that could make all the silk in the universe?*

She giggled under his kiss. *I'd never stop.*
Good. Very good.

He slipped his tongue into her mouth and she felt her belly liquefy.

And if you could think strands into existence? How many strands would you make to fill a universe? Could you stretch yourself that far?

I wouldn't have to stretch. I'd know.

"Hermes, you let me know if you're gonna sweat her here on my rug so I can get a good vantage point and make myself comfy." Across from them, Athene shifted daintily on the couch.

Hermes slowly disengaged himself and planted a brotherly kiss on Arachne's forehead. "We'll continue this later. Gramma here likes to take snapshots and sell 'em."

Behind Arachne, the loom was a presence calling to the back of her head. She coughed into her hand and grinned at Hermes. "If you'll excuse me, I'm working —"

"By all means."

Athene looked after her with eyebrows raised. She said to Hermes, "Your son Eros is a bad influence."

A Long Time Ago ...

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, writers such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner and more.

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Lifting his caduceus, she playfully smacked her half-brother on the rump.

Hermes was sprawled on the couch, in bluejeans and cowboy boots. Wings fluttered in place of spurs. A *Spiderman* comic book obscured his flannel shirt as he read. He sprang up, leaving the comic on the coffee table, and bounded to Arachne's room. If his half-sister had planted a dream in that young beauty's head, he was going to see what it was.

He passed her loom and studied a tapestry of pinpoints. Alternately they spread thin and clustered together, meeting in tiny knots tied into the warp. Subtle shadings of indigo held fiery touches of red and gold and, beyond that, black.

Carefully he stepped around skeins of wool and approached the bed. Arachne, black hair fanned over her face, lay on her side with her left arm dangling beyond her pillow, pointing. Hermes knelt beside her and gazed beyond her forehead....

She skated the beams of a web that pulsed with golden light. Cross-strands dwindled to vanishing points.

Squatting, securely planted on a tightrope, Arachne's hand closed around the beam and disappeared in waves of electromagnetic radiation. Tingling, she felt its pull against her and inside; even as she rested a web streamed forth from her, unwinding somewhere else. Someone else had built the web that held her; now she was building another, one that she could not see.

She felt herself as a body of stars. Of galaxies and clusters of galaxies where they had spread thin and then clustered into knots. Of pinpoints. At the same time she was tiny, ten trillion times smaller than an atomic nucleus. They were one and the same. The soul knows all dimensions. A mile-high spire of grass becomes the wisp of a blade.

She followed a glowing trail. Strands ran parallel to hers. Energy fields crossed her path, curving toward the focus. She negotiated a maze from the outside in, all roads leading to cohesion. Or to chaos, where webs intertwined and energies multiplied, to the point where they would burst through their own fabric and open a new pathway, a new web....

She saw Athene superimposed at the breakfast table, flinging dishes at the sink. Saw the dishes meet and pass through each other, saw a shaft of light spear their common space. As though the light had been a portal admitting itself to another dimension, photons taking a course of least resistance. Moving forward once more, Arachne skimmed over an electric current of 100 quintillion amperes.

"Black holes have eight legs," Hermes's voice called in riddle to her back. "A spider eats its web before it builds anew."

She was running now, toward the increasing light. Toward a meeting of all the weavers she had ever been.

Sunlight streamed into her window and fell on her hair, striping her face beneath with gold. Her eyes opened and she sat, felt gentle hands on her shoulders and grabbed them. She pulled them around her and crossed them over her chest. "Hermes—"

"Yes, dearest."

She turned around and pulled him to her. She buried her head in his chest, unable to speak.

"They are called cosmic strings," he whispered, rounding the curve of her ear with his fingertip. "Every universe is a web. The webs are going to meet, and tangle, and be re-cast on another plane or everything will turn back to Chaos." He added, "Old grumpy god, that Chaos. He was *passee* eons ago."

"What do I do?"

"Weave," he said simply.

"Look at me!" Trembling, she pressed herself harder against him. Her head was upturned by his shoulder, eyes gazing at the space beyond the ceiling. "I was nothing but a spider! Children have killed me without a second thought."

"What you said last night—"

"You were joking with me last night!"

"— was true." He passed his hands through her nightgown and felt her ridged spine. He brought them around and cupped her abdomen. "Your silk is energy."

Arachne felt a jolt through her stomach and twitched. "Hermes, what are you doing to me?"

"Letting you know your silk, so you can use it."

As though her veins had been opened, she lay under the Olympian's touch and filled with a force like the swelling of a river, like a solar flare. Soon the heat and cold combined, her body pulling in powers that drenched her. She began to laugh, giddy and drunk as Hermes caressed her belly and waist. An aura of red light rose from between her legs, spread through her nightgown and out and traveled to her head in shades of orange, yellow, green, blue, and indigo. Violet crowned the top of her head.

On impulse she reached out and pointed upwards. A blue spark shot from her fingertip and thundered against the ceiling, splitting paint and dropping a shower of plaster dust on her forehead.

A plate careened in from the doorway and smashed against the bedpost. Arachne jumped as ceramic shards fell against her feet.

"Hermes, get out." Athene strode into the bedroom and jabbed her finger at Arachne. She jerked her finger up and Arachne rose, closer and closer to the ceiling, lifted to hang limply over the bed. The woman groped for a hold and grabbed air.

"You don't climb a web before you build it."

Athene's voice was deadly. "You don't perform parlor tricks before you understand them." She dropped her hand to her side.

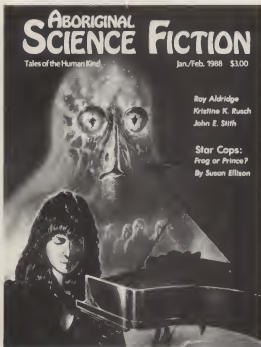
Arachne felt herself begin to fall. She splayed her fingers, pointing to the mattress, and felt a rush of warmth travel up and into them from her stomach. Her heart pounded wildly, aching to burst through her chest as she continued to float, held by a shell of energy that pushed her up as she sent it down to the bed. She glimpsed Hermes's open mouth, his eyes sick with worry, before she blacked out.

The Olympian caught her and slammed his palm against her heart. Athene made a sound of disgust. "Just like you to give her the tools that will kill her before she knows how to use them."

"She's not dead."



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"And lucky for you!" Athene swung around the room and eased Arachne back onto the bed. Hermes raised his hand to catch his caduceus as it sailed in from the den. "She's been preparing for her destiny since Hypaepa; of course she wouldn't realize what it is! And you, so eager to channel to that next tier of existence you'd let her burn herself out."

Hermes caught Athene's stare in his own. Beneath her rage, he saw envy. "You, of course, have the requisite experience so as not to burn yourself out," he said softly, bending down to tend to Arachne. "Would that you could only have the weaving skills that bested you before — and will do so again."

A hundred dishes smashed loudly in the kitchen. Athene stood calmly by the bed, arms folded, gazing at the loom.

"Of course, you've ruined her tapestry once before," Hermes continued, waving his caduceus over the prone body. "Do it this time, and that's the end of us and humans both."

"I know."

Athene turned and looked down at Arachne's pale cheeks rendered colorless by her exertions. She, Athene, who had given fire to Prometheus — who had taught the Cyclops and Hephaestus to forge lightning for her father Zeus — she, who had guided Odysseus safely through his journeys and back home to Ithaca, would pale to a shadow of her doubtful existence in these modern times. All because of the destiny of a girl, a waif with nimble fingers.

Hermes looked up, into her sad eyes. "As the mortals say nowadays, you're a generalist, my dear." He rose and planted a kiss on Athene's cheek. "Arachne is a specialist. This ain't the old country, Gramma." He grinned.

Athene spun on her heel and strode to the kitchen. Hermes heard chimes as he worked over his patient, glanced with his Sight and saw the hundred dishes reassembled, mended as their pieces rang together, their cracks sealed shut.

"Look deeper."

Beside Athene, Arachne sat on her heels in the garden. In her left hand she held a keystone-shaped piece of jasper, maroon banded with brown.

"I see crystals," Arachne said.

Athene smiled. "Then you are looking farther than a conventional microscope. Look more deeply and eventually you will reach the subatomic level. If you change a spin, an orientation, at that level, you change the structure of matter. You change the perception of matter. You have already done that, but did not know how, and it almost killed you. If you see what you are doing, you can control your strength."

Gazing intently, Arachne listened. The words of the Olympian lodged inside her, bypassing her resistances. She looked more deeply, striving to reach into the atomic nuclei of the crystals she held encased in the stone in her hand.

They sat inside a domed field. Beyond the rose glow of their bubble lay stalks and branches gleaming with snow and frost. Athene laid her palm against the warm, translucent membrane: an extension of her own energies reinforced by the churning of the earth

below her, where Hades rolled in crimson veins of metamorphic rock. Appropriate, Hades. Darkness, she thought, like Chaos. *You will not mock me, Hermes.*

Sometimes Arachne worked with crystals and pebbles, sometimes with water. More often, she worked with wool. When she wove, her loom expanded in size under her touch. She thought at first that she was mistaken, that it was an illusion: one of Athene's lessons disguised as parlor trick. But it was Arachne's energy that went into her tapestry and into the wool that spun between her fingers. Her knots grew smaller and more widely spaced as the web between them grew. Whether she wove individual stars or individual atoms, she could not say. She knew that it did not matter.

The loom eclipsed her window, stretching the length of the wall. Her skeins remained ample; her colors changed as she wove them, absorbing and reflecting lights other than the rays that fell around her.

She slept snuggled in the crook of Hermes's arm, and dreamt of Heaven. He told her that Mount Olympus was a molehill and she laughed. Pressing herself against him she could feel the powers that coursed underneath his skin, could explore with her mind the knit of his bones. Outside each cell nucleus, she found the double-helix inherited from his mother Maia and the nonhuman women before her.

She passed her hand up across his thighs, and between his legs.

His hold around her tightened as her fingers moved. He felt her spin tiny webs of energy around him and tingled. She ordered him, "Lie still."

"With pleasure," he murmured.

He stole into her mind and saw himself pieced together, a composite puzzle. He saw his eyebrows rise in segments.

She drew him into her, legs and arms wrapped equally around his body, hands and feet moving in a busy rhythm. He was wrapped in tingling, as a resonance encircled his groin and then his waist, rising to flush at his neck. He hugged Arachne to him, feeling sticky as fermenting ambrosia. Moaning lightly, he began to thrust.

He started to move his hands to cup her buttocks against him, and was paralyzed.

Strings of energy continued to wrap around him. His eyes grew wide and he gazed again into her brain. He saw himself again in segments, the melding of eight ocular visions. He explored the insides of her body and found hunger. *Good Gods...*

He tried to open his mouth to speak, when Arachne's lips closed over his own and he felt his strength sucked out and into her. *Arachne!* He aimed his call like a lance into her mind. *Arachne, STOP!!*

The fabric of webbing between them blotted it out. He began to struggle. Arachne, entranced, continued her work. She followed his outbursts and subdued them, binding him.

His caduceus was leaning against the bedpost. Through a haze of pain, Hermes guided a thin beam of will in its direction, arced out of the reach of Arachne's fingers. His stomach was searing hot, his

legs turned to molten lead as Arachne leaned over him round and plumped, ruddy-cheeked and unaware, enslaved to instincts from another life. The caduceus clattered against the bed, banging out an alarm softly, then louder. Hermes grimaced at the ringing in his ears as the clanging sent vibrations up through brass.

Pallas Athene remained conspicuous by her absence. Hermes focused on her helmet and owl on the fireplace mantle, moved his mind into the helmet and looked out through the eye holes burned into bronze. Once more he saw Arachne transformed into spider, under his half-sister's guiding influence.

With an internal shriek he shot his willpower into the caduceus. It whipped through the air like a saber, cut into the web that sucked his energies from him and sliced. Its serpents writhed, a double-helix wrapping around the web that wrapped around him. The serpents hissed, their own fangs widespread, pulling the golden threads through them and back into their bearer.

Arachne stopped her motions. Hermes pulled his hands from her back and flexed his fingers, working circulation back into them. *Your own brother, Athene! Or would you have come just as I was about to be scattered to the winds?*

Arachne stared at him, arms resting lightly against his back, and blinked in confusion. Hermes let himself fall back onto the pillows, his sweat pouring into the sheets. His chest continued to heave. "Arachne—" he gasped.

She touched him gingerly on the thigh. "I thought I was about to—"

"Eat me alive," he said calmly, exhausted. "You thought I was a fly."

"I what?" She spied his caduceus on the floor, gleaming with a riot of color that began to fade. Hermes closed his eyes as his breathing began to slow. Arachne lay down beside him, holding her face over his. "Hermes."

"Athene wanted to prove her point that a specialist is unsuited for the job," he whispered, eyes still closed. "She wanted to give me a good scare, so she changed your perceptions from the inside."

Arachne made a fist against the bed. "How?"

"By making you work with media other than your own. She can work her will into you, through those things that are less familiar to you." He opened his eyes, saw Arachne's worried frown and ran his thumb across her lips. "No fangs...that's good. Keep using the loom and don't stray from it. What you can learn through anything else, you'll learn through that, and better."

"Let me dream what happened to you," she said.

He chuckled. "Too nightmarish. You don't need that."

"Let me dream it so it doesn't happen again. I was acting like a spider, and that is what I am familiar with."

Arachne wove. Her loom changed daily, hourly. Minute alterations, stitch by stitch, transformed her tapestry into a place where futures lay empty of substance until given form. What the Fates had performed in legend for mortals — Clotho spinning the

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strings of human lives, Lachesis weaving their destinies, and Atropos terminating their threads — Arachne performed for matter, for gravitational anomalies and gauge fields. What was gravity but a web, the force that bound all things to enter it? Where did the Big Bang come from, if not an entrance from another place, a web consumed to be re-spun?

When the wall was filled with Arachne's weaving, Athene's house began to expand. The loom multiplied into manifolds, dimensions compacted. A seasoned traveler, Hermes guided Arachne through them as she learned new pathways and maps. Once she turned a corner and her loom was covered with spiders weaving into and out of the wool, arachnids that did what she did. An infinitude of spinnerets pulling liquid into solid, empty into bursting. Moving the universes inexorably toward cohesion.

Athene, dressed in full armor, watched in silence. Her helmet was pushed back on her forehead, the owl at her shoulder came to life and blinking a sleepy eye at a weave of patterns too small for human perception. The Olympian's hair was bunned up inside the helmet, but her skin was smooth and milky, all age lines removed. Hermes raised an eyebrow at her.

"Perhaps I only need to feel new again," she offered, fixing him with an inquiring look.

Arachne's tapestry had begun to disengage from its frame, its tassels snapping in a gathering wind. Waves of iridescence curled around her.

Hermes made to call out to her before she disappeared in a swirl of fabric and light, when Athene placed her hand on his arm and shook her head. "She has to get out there first," she said, "before we can follow. And then," Athene added, "she will be a part of those things that form us."

Arachne was no longer conscious of them, or of Athene's house. Her mind traveled where her fingers could not, feeding lines out from inexhaustible reserves. However long it took the universes to expand before they met at the portal, Arachne would spend it producing the silk to accommodate the new structure, fusing it with the webbing of her counterparts. Their work would mingle, and hatch from the closed loop of their present web. The new web would shoot sidelong, the next Big Bang in all its manifold dimensions, through warp of space and weft of time.

Arachne could see the center's approach. She continued her spinning, working from the outside-in. Her identities merged as she manipulated the particles of which everything was composed. She was the magma of Hades and the lightning of Zeus; she was Athene's wisdom sprung fullblown and Hermes's flight between dimensions. She was human and Olympian and spinner, Demeter and Hera, Ishtar as well as Aphrodite, Mehezh and Brigit and Agni and Au Set. She was a string, a theory, an equation. She was a particle zipping through a cyclotron, a cosmic ray blinking through the Earth in a flash.

Mortals always were the last to find out about their chosen, woven destinies. The woman from Hypaepa raced, now, toward hers, with sleight of hand and singular purpose. Back to the beginning, when all was new — with all knots securely in place, and a universe held fast. □

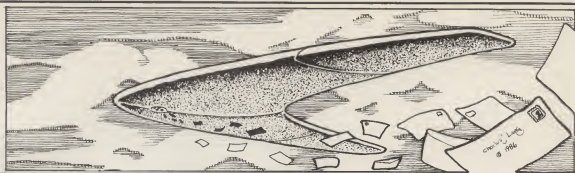
We're running out of back issues



OUR PREMIER ISSUES: The supply is limited, which is why we have to charge \$4.00 each for copies of our first eleven issues — they are already collectors' items. Get your copies of the magazine that broke all the rules. Four-color illustrations by award-winning artists, stories by Hugo and Nebula winners. Find out why it's called *Aboriginal SF*. Who is our crazy alien publisher? Read about "The Home System," specially created for us by master world-builder Hal Clement. Book and movie reviews and more. The second issue has an award-winning cover by Carl Lundgren and exciting stories by George Zebrowski, Elizabeth Anne Hull, Joel Sherman, Rory Harper, and more. The third issue features Connie Willis and Charles L. Grant and has a great cover by Bob Eggleton and stories by Kristine K. Rusch, Patricia Anthony, Dean Whitlock and others. The fourth issue of *Aboriginal SF* **IS SOLD OUT**. The fifth issue **IS SOLD OUT**. Issue six has a novelette by Ian Watson and stories by Robert A. Metzger, Martha Soukup and a return appearance by Emily Devenport, among others. Issue #7 features stories by Steven R. Boyett, Patricia Anthony and Rebecca Lee. (Please note: Issues 1 through 7 have four-color art but are *not* printed on slick paper.) Issue #8 was our history-making first full-color, full-slick issue with stories by Kristine K. Rusch, Ray Aldridge and John E. Stith and others. Ben Bova's novelette, "Impact," led off issue #9 and was accompanied by great stories from Paul A. Gilster, Elaine Radford and Chris Boyce and some terrific art by Bob Eggleton, David R. Deitrick and others. *Aboriginal* #10 featured stories by Pat Anthony, Robert A. Metzger and Jamil Nasir, an interview with a co-editor of the new *Twilight Zone* TV series and our usual columns. Issue #11 included stories by Patricia Anthony, Emily Devenport and Phillip C. Jennings

Act quickly. Send \$4.00 plus \$.50 for postage and handling for each copy you want to: *Aboriginal SF*, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.

Or order all nine (issues 1-3 and 6-11) for \$32.00 and we'll pay the postage.



Boomerangs

Comments From Our Readers

To the Editor:

Three things:

1. One of the best investments I've made in many a moon was subscribing to *Aboriginal* back in March and buying your back issues! I have now read them all, from the March-April 1988 issue backward to the first. (History should be read backward, too, from where we are to what brought us here.) Other readers' letters have used up nearly all the approbative adjectives and yet missed the one I think fits *Aboriginal* best: *felicitous*. It's not a word one can use often these days, unfortunately, but it works just fine here.

2. Your Alien Publisher's views of humankind are extraordinarily perceptive. They remind me that we earthlings have lost our sense of wonder at the world around us. They also remind me of John Campbell at his editorial best. The Alien's name, by the way, seems to be ('Xruso'). That 'merely' tells you that the accent is on the first syllable. The first consonant, X, sounds quite a bit like the German *ach-laut*, the second is the RP *taped r* (as in the British pronunciation of 'awry') and the u is a very tight, sort of "cardinal" oo, rather like the first two centiseconds of the w in "we." I'm still tinkering with my breadboard diode to get the signal better, and I'm still struggling with the exo-phonetics, so I haven't got his first name right yet. It sounds a bit like Er-ah-bin-sion. I'm glad your signal intercepts are better than mine; I'm not getting the reports here at all; by the time I can get this jury-rigged in, all I receive in the clear is his audio signature at the end. Of course, ('Xruso') may be only a *nom de plume*.

3. A SASE is enclosed for your writer's guidelines. I am intimidated by the high quality of the fiction in *Aboriginal* but I'll see what I can come up with. I've mainly written

textbooks, though I've sold a couple of SETI stories and a poem to *Analog*.

Sincerely,

Francis Cartier, Ph.D.

Pacific Grove, California

P.S. The brackets on ('Xruso') indicate I'm using the symbols of the International Phonetic Association. This is obviously the only solution when a culture has no orthographic system.

To the Editor:

Thank you for starting and editing such a fine magazine as *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. I have thoroughly enjoyed the stories and I do prefer the smaller, slick style.

Enclosed is a SASE for your writer's guidelines.

I sincerely hope that *Aboriginal* will last since I was very disappointed when *Galileo* was discontinued. I have all but the first issue of *Galileo* and its splendid art work. The quality of *Aboriginal's* art work is one of its very best attractions.

I have always been fascinated by science fiction art because I can compare my mind's eye picture, shaped by the author's words, with the visual media created by an artist who has also responded to the same words. I really enjoyed the cover art of *Galileo* for its size and quality. Tom Barber's work was especially good in combining the best of artistic quality and science fiction ideas.

Keep up the good work. There are many fans of science fiction here in Wyoming and I am spreading the word about *Aboriginal*.

Sincerely,

Zack Rinderer

Rawlins, Wyoming

To the Editor:

I discovered science fiction with "The Magic Ball from Mars" back when everybody liked Ike. Then I got hold of "Starmen's Son" by Andre

Norton, and that clinched it. However, in all my years of reading I never subscribed to a science fiction magazine until *Aboriginal SF* came along.

I can't imagine how I lived so long in a vacuum.

I was surprised but thrilled to receive all those back issues when we subscribed, and really piggied out. Among my favorite stories were "Every Sparrow That Falls," "Merchant Dying," "Tiger's Heart," "Sunshine Delight," "To Be an Auk," "What Brothers Are For" — I could go on and on.

Now that I've gobbled up all the back issues, I have to rely on the new ones coming out. By strict rationing and stern self-control, I managed to make the May-June issue last two whole days — "A Third Chance" and "Sweet Tooth at Io" were great. Now I'm back to waiting for my next fix.

Do you have any idea how long two months is? Can't you PLEASE think about going monthly?

There's only one other thing that would make me enjoy *Aboriginal* more — I'll bet you know what that is, don't you? After 11 years of stinkiness — during which I only wrote what was required for my newspaper job — I've started doing real stuff again. I attribute my recovery to having attended a Bob Dylan concert — as an added boost, Allen Ginsberg was in the audience.

Anyway, I am enclosing a SASE for your writer's guidelines.

Thanks,

Nikki Patrick

My dearest Charlie,

I find I must congratulate you on your excellent magazine. In issue No. 5, a story entitled "It Came From the Slushpile" caught my attention. I tried to find fault with it and failed miserably. Do you accept stories from teens? I hope so. I want to be a writer, but to me, my stories never go any-

where. I'll keep trying, though.

Where is your publisher from? Is he, she, it, from the Xorpha galaxy by any chance? You see, I currently have this alien-type thing residing in my house. It enjoys eating Campbell's soup cans and bacon drippings (*It must be related to the late Andy Warhol* — Ed.), and is not above munching on the dog when he can get away with it. On warm days he sunbathes in my microwave and insists that I add sand. He enjoys sleeping in my lingerie drawer, which I find embarrassing and troublesome on Monday mornings. I have to do something with him soon! He beats up neighborhood kids and I'm starting to get complaints from car owners that find their cars mysteriously rewired to open all doors when the lights are turned on and the radio spits ice out. He ate the neighbor's gray Persian tabby and drained the public pool in the middle of a swim session. Help! What's bus fare to Xorpha?

Sincerely,
Claire Broze

P.S. Are you married? (Yes — Ed.)

To the Editor:

On Feb. 17, I wrote you a letter (which you printed) in praise of your reviewer, Janice Eisen.

As a result of her review of *Kill Ratio*, I purchased a copy and enjoyed the book, which I had previously intended not to buy.

As another result, I did not buy *Ether Ore*, which I had contemplated getting. In a later issue, you printed a letter by the respected Mr. Bova, who went up in flames at Miss Eisen's review of that book. (He has had a distinguished career in the SF field, including prestigious editing assignments, and *must* know better!)

It seemed only fair to buy and read *Ether Ore*, which I did. That is, I bought it and struggled manfully to read it. After one-quarter of the way through, having found nothing in the least interesting, I gave up. Skimming through the rest did not reveal anything better. So Miss Eisen batted 1.000 for me.

In Mr. Bova's defense, it is quite possible that fans of Douglas Adams might well love *Ether Ore*. If so, it would have a huge market; Adams books have invariably hit the *New York Times* bestseller lists. I was unable to finish the third Hitchhiker book, and didn't buy the later ones.

In conclusion, Miss Eisen does a superb job of reviewing for people like me, and I hope she continues to do so. Perhaps she could be more tactful (without pulling her punches), and try to indicate what audience might like the books that she doesn't.

Yours truly,
Dean S. Thomas, Jr.
Rochester, New York

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I've been meaning to write to tell you just how much I enjoy *Aboriginal*, but something always seemed to come up. Maybe this will make up for it: enclosed is my check for *Aboriginal*'s first anthology.

My first exposure to your magazine came via a flyer that appeared in my mail box one day advertising something called "*Aboriginal* (?) *Science Fiction*." The odd title, beautiful art, and the list of big-name authors all influenced me to give *Aboriginal* a try. Boy, was I glad I did. The art in full color was better than that in the flyer, then came glossy art, then baggies to protect it. What next? (*Wait and see.* — Ed.)

But any SF mag's strength is based on the strength of its contributing authors. It was a very pleasant surprise to see such names as Aldiss, Card, and Pohl in a brand new mag. I can hardly wait for the Ellison story. It's at least as much fun to discover new authors who are now on their ways to becoming old favorites, Rusch, Metzger, Anthony. (Anthony's "What Brothers Are For" will stay with me at least as long as "The Cold Equations.") Both have the same haunting quality.)

Keep up the good work,
Don Donati
Hines, Illinois

Dear *Aboriginal*,

When I received the first issue of *Aboriginal*, I wasn't sure what was going on. I wondered what kind of mailing list I got put on this time. The first thing I read was the Alien Publisher. Well, let's be honest, I am a confessed Sci-Fi junkie and this had me hooked. When I finished the first issue, I started bugging my parents to let me subscribe. (It wasn't hard to convince my Dad — I've had to fight him to see who gets to read it first. It's his fault for my "condition." My parents saw 2001 just a few days before I was born. Obviously, I got my love of science fiction through osmosis and heredity.) Anyway I kept trying to get a subscription. I thought my order blank got lost. I finally found out Mom went ahead and subscribed and gave me the second issue for Christmas.

Last fall I started my freshman year at Mount Union College. As you know, I had to change my mailing address (to make sure Dad didn't read it before me. If you haven't already, could you start mailing it to my home address again?) Unfortunately, I didn't realize how little time I'd have for my reading habit. Your magazine always seemed to come at the worst times, like before mid-terms and finals. It took all my self-control to study, rather than read it.

I have two questions. 1. Some-

times I find the language in some of the stories offensive. Do authors have to use that kind of language? The stories are fine without it. 2. Is Jessie Horsting a Klingon or something? It could be my imagination, but she always seems to have a negative attitude towards *Star Trek*.

I love the new size and slick format. Bravo! The artwork (especially Bob Eggleton's for "The Phoenix Riddle," "Sing," "Solo for Concert Grand," "Impact" and David R. Deitrick's for "Muttmind") is FANTASTIC! The stories keep getting better, too. Some of my favorites are "Sing," "Symphony in Urso Major," "Solo for Concert Grand" (I'm a Music Education Major, I'm prejudiced), "Sight Unseen," "Doing Time," "The Darkfishers," "It Came From the Slushpile," "Every Sparrow That Falls," "True Magic" (I'm glad I don't have profs like that), "Scout's Honor," "Bonflower," "Muttmind," and "Impact."

I've been meaning to write since I got my first issue. Now that school's out, I have time. One more thing, could you send me a writer's guideline (the SASE is enclosed)? I've been doing a little writing in my "spare time."

Sincerely,
Shari Sanor

P.S. The book reviews are very helpful. Keep up the GREAT work! I finally found out what kind of mailing list I got put on. A good one, since I got your magazine.

Hi there,

You all do such excellent work of combining marvelous new SF, colorful and great art, and informative, fun articles that I want more *Aboriginal*.

Please find enclosed my order for 18 issues of *Aboriginal*.

Your efforts are well appreciated.
Gordon Randall

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Hi! I am a new fan of your great magazine. I have been looking for a magazine like yours for a long time. A magazine that features plenty of artwork from new and talented artists — especially Bob Eggleton. I loved his artwork for Kristine K. Rusch's "Sing" and, of course, the story. I love the concept of reading the story from the non-human character's point of view.

I love space art. I was wondering if it were feasible to have a section of your magazine devoted to a featured artist's artwork? It would be great to have a different art gallery in every issue. (*Actually, that has been part of our long-term game plan ever since we began. We just have to wait until we have a few more pages to work with. Soon, we hope.* — Ed.) Also I never knew your magazine existed

until I picked up a copy of *Cinefantastique*. (Hence, your once-in-a-lifetime advertisement was in the back.) I ordered your magazine and waited and waited. My first copy arrived and, boy!, was it worth the wait.

Then I ordered all your back issues ... and waited and waited. By the way, is there a shortage of staff in your shipping and receiving department? If there is, I am within driving distance of your magazine ... (We are *shorthand*ed and we do have an opening or two. See the classified section. — Ed.)

Kevin Reed
Peabody, MA

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Aboriginal has been a very exciting magazine for me. In recent months you have been publishing great stories by members of the Taos Writers of the Future Workshop, the Pulphouse Group (I especially enjoy Kris Rusch's work), and finally "A Speaking Likeness," by Bonnie Kale who is in my Cleveland workshop. When she brought this story to the workshop, most of us did not know her very well, and the story was so good there were murmurings that it was a ringer.

I look forward to every new issue of *Aboriginal*. It is on the leading edge of great short fiction in America. (High praise, indeed. — Ed.)

Mary A. Turzillo
Warren, OH

Dear Charlie,
Charles Lang's illustrations for my story "Cat Scratch" are wonderful. Please tell him I said so.

About the name controversy — I'm very surprised. I've always been impressed with the name *Aboriginal SF*. It's gutsy, intriguing, and has a hell of a lot of class. I can understand the alphabet thing too. You should hear some of the zany reasons ... oh well, maybe you shouldn't. You might stop buying my stories!

As for the ABO nickname — you refer to yourselves as ABO with pride and affection. Ain't nothing wrong with that. I think if you were referring to someone else by that word, maybe it would be different. I suppose you could always shorten it to ASF ... Heck, I don't know. I just think it would be a shame if you had to change your terrific title. That's all I got to say about that. (For now.)

Take care,
Emily Devenport
(ASF is used by Analog, so we can't use that. — Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I just read your Sept.-Oct. '88 issue. Great! I enjoyed all the stories, and the poems as well. And the art! Everything! "Who Made the Stew on Betelgeuse II?" addresses an issue I've wondered about for some time. Who knows whether more galactically-oriented citizens would consider us planet-bound humans can-

nibals. After all, we kill and consume life which comes from our own planet! Of course, the other side of that coin is, what differentiates food from friend? My two cats, by virtue of not being human, are likewise not considered intelligent as we see it. That doesn't mean I'd eat them.

Carl Pearson
Houston, TX

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I de-shelved and bought a copy of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* yesterday because of the title; it's unique! Seldom does a creation come into its own under the auspices of "Cult-dom," which is where I see your magazine heading for at light speed. (Robes make me itchy and I hate airport lobbies. But if you mean growing hordes of avid readers, I'll agree. — Ed.) Let me at least pretend to speak for the masses when I say, "We are tired of mainstream intellect!" which is what those other "prozines" are.

Sure they're good, but you've been blessed with a curse; controversy — and your material is GOOD. Let the Aussies shrink in horror in the face of your audacity. And remember — controversy sells.

Please don't lose me in a name change. Your magazine is the first to captivate me from cover to cover — starting with the cover.

Respectfully,
J. Thomas Starr
San Diego, CA

You didn't miss July

You did not miss your July-August issue of *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. As mentioned in the May-June issue of the magazine, there was no July-August issue. The July-August issue was called the Sept.-Oct. issue. The change was made so distribution of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* could coincide with the same timetable used by other publications. Also, our new computer house goofed — twice. It put what was supposed to be your last issue number on the right side of the Sept.-Oct. issue, rather than the left. Aside from being in the wrong place, it was the wrong number. Those mishaps should be corrected for the label on this issue which means your last issue number should be on the top line on the left hand side. You will still get the number of issues you subscribed to. For your record-keeping purposes, this is *Aboriginal Science Fiction* No. 12. □

The next issue

Love is a powerful motivating force, but it often can be obsessive. And that is the problem facing the protagonist of Kristine K. Rusch's story "Looking for Miriam." You might say that love, in one form or another, plays a role in every story in the issue. The love in "The Cave Beneath the Falls" by Jonathan Lethem is a twist on Cyrano de Bergerac's dilemma. Breaking up is so hard to do, which is why the telepathic protagonist of this story hires out to take care of the painful details for his clients. But what happens if he falls in love while occupying his client's body ...? How can someone with a buzz saw in her bellybutton love a bookish computer nerd? Find out in Greg Cox's zany "Hana and his Synapses." Computers play a supportive role in "The Next Step" by Resa Nelson, when they are used to help a woman, crippled by an accident, regain her ability to walk ... and yes, that's a love story, too. Love of man for machine even plays a role in "Three if by Norton," by Ralph Roberts, and Courtney Skinner has done a great piece of cover art for the story. And finally, if we have space, and to counterbalance "They Want Our Women" in our last issue, we'll have some Regency SF in "The Indecorous Rescue of Clarinda Merwin" by B. W. Clough, whose book, *The Name of the Sun*, is reviewed in this issue. □

Wave

(Continued from page 14)

sulting to all the writers who had created the form, as downbeat incomprehensible drooling garbage. At best, it was patronized with the dismissive judgment that it was "failed experimentation," and not worthy of more than a sniff and a sneer.

One critic, an otherwise salutary fellow noted for his scholarly attention to the writings of Cordwainer Smith — whose work was unquestionably a precursor of "New Wave" artfulness and experimentation — launched a genre-wide jihad against what he called "the new wavings." I had to look it up. But not even *Van Nostrand's Scientific Encyclopedia* (4th Edition) offered a definition of the word *wavicle**. At first I thought it might be some deliquescent confection. You know: Popsicle, Creamsicle, Fudgesicle, Wavesicle. But then I realized that such frippery on my part was unresponsive to the seriousness of the charges being leveled against all these writers who were suddenly being called "the New Wave," one of whom was me. Finally, I arrived at a workable thesis for the gentleman's use of a word so obscure that not even the *OED* contained a definition: he was operating on a level that we mere mortals were denied. And I went back to sleep.

Because that small group of reactionaries was knocked flat and trampled into the dust by the thundering masses that rushed to embrace the "New Wave" of sf writing.

The serious critics praised *Orbit* and *Dangerous Visions*, and the soon-to-emerge *Quark*, *New Dimensions*, *Nova* and ongoing *New Worlds* anthologies with a fervor that made us amoral, anarchistic, unpatriotic purveyors of failed experimentation weep with gratitude. The

dam had been waiting to burst for years, and when the flood began, nothing could stop it.

Nothing but time, of course.

Time passed, the worthy work was integrated, emulated, and became just another part of the arsenal of literary weapons the good writers who came after us would take as givens.

Who was affected?

Well, Michael Bishop, Connie Willis, John Varley, George Alec Effinger, William Gibson, Rudy Rucker, David Brin, Greg Benford, Robert Silverberg, Kim Stanley Robinson, Michael Swanwick, Edward Bryant, Tim Powers, John Shirley, Bruce Sterling, and perhaps a hundred others either opened like flowers to the new freedom of expression, or went far beyond those first intimations of what could be done. The unsuccessful experiments faded into the obscurity they deserved, and the triumphs are being taught in hundreds of college literature classes to this day.

Who was not affected?

A notable group that included Clarke, Campbell, de Camp, Niven, Pournelle, Herbert and Laumer ... all of whom had found their strong voices and continued to deliver top-flight stories despite the yowls and bleats of the reactionaries who said the New Wave would destroy science fiction. Thus proving that the genre was bigger and more fecund than those doubters would have let us believe. It proved that there was not just one way to write this stuff, but thousands of ways. One way each for every writer who wasn't intimidated by hoary catechisms of what "science fiction" was supposed to be.

And time passed, and what was hot ticket controversial then ... became history.

Because of the New Wave — whether it existed in fact, or was in truth a *hundred* waves, each one writer deep — the audience grew up, as well. It grew up, first, into "engagement," then into

"realism"; it developed a capacity for partisanship, a curiosity about anxiety, a taste for the bravura performance; it embraced illusion and questioned immutability; and it survived the transition from the revolutionary '60s to the chillier atmosphere of the '70s and Cyberpunk '80s.

In his August 1986 viewpoint essay in *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*, one of the most talented of the "cyberpunk" writers, Michael Swanwick, pays proper homage to the New Wave writers of the '60s and '70s, and he quotes from Gardner Dozois in the 1981 *Best of the Year* anthology edited by that post-New Wave author and editor, speaking of recent works by Shirley and Sterling and Yermakov: "It seems to portend the development of a sort of 'punk SF,' developing upon a set of sensibilities that to date have been represented in SF primarily by the work of Harlan Ellison."

And while I unashamedly preen in the glow of those words, it is only because I know that I was only a small part of the movement that broke sf loose from its whalebone corset and antimacassar snood. Bill Gibson and Bruce Sterling and Pat Cadigan and all the rest of the brilliant coterie of young writers who have been blowing the field apart — again, anew — would not have had as unbarricaded a road to travel had it not been for those who got the scars in that unremembered war of words: Phil Dick and Mike Moorcock and Bob Silverberg and Ursula Le Guin and Joanna Russ and Kate Wilhelm, and all the rest of us who went out there and sucked up them bullets.

I find it odd to be recounting history when it all comes in fresh and clear through memory. It happened yesterday. And yesterday, as Bob Heinlein often said, is only the foreshadowing of tomorrow.

And there, in all those tomorrows, is where we work.

PFC Ellison, over and out. □

* To forestall any nitpickers, I know very well that the word *wavicle* comes from quantum mechanics. The point is: No decent sized dictionary

contains the word. The word is as obscure as the point being made by the fools who used it. The self-important martinets who punned the word

thought they were incredibly clever; in truth, all they were, was incredibly obtuse. I rest my case.

Allegiance

(Continued from page 24)

reconcile those differences, smooth out those ill feelings which lie just beneath the surface like a jet-black water predator awaiting some insect unaware."

"You know, I think it's time I tried to understand your people — just talk with one of you a while. I've been hating you for such a long time, and now you're our allies. Maybe by talking to you I can learn to get over that. Tell me, where are you staying?"

Backly taken was I! Imbued with wondering awe and awesome wonder was I! Why, I had thought that putting the make on this Terrestrial fox would be a feat of near-mythic dimension (not that I did not adjudge myself equal to the task, you understand), yet lo and behold, she is grooving on the vibes I am charismatically broadcasting. Perhaps it is true, what they say about Earth women and their tastes. I foamed in anticipation.

"O, vision of loveliness, omphalic jewel of creation, currently I am residing in a dome of distinctly pleasure-oriented dimension, a tall blue-and-white pinnacle of human architectural triumph on thrice-eleven street, which doth evoke wonder in my very —"

"The ET Hilton," she so sweetly spaketh.

"Yea, verily."

"May I go with you? Just to talk, for a while ... if you have the time?"

"Oh, Peerless Princess, you can indeed!" Perhaps when I got her up to my far-out bachelor pad I could slip a morphia cube into her drink. Or perhaps she was a doper and we could rub some 'disiac into one another's epidermal tissue. Oh, bliss, sweet, universal harmony. Freakin' A, Jackson.

Merrily we perambulated along the pedwalk to the ETHilton.

Once in my quaint but cool room I sat her down in a chair — one made for humans, I mean, not a proper one — and attempted to persuade her to imbibe some delightfully exotic liquid refreshments I had engineered past the customs gendarmes. She refused, and I said, "Are you quite sure, Kewpie doll of my dreams?"

She laughed. It is a strange sound, but I am trained to recognize it.

"What amuses you so, chick? Prithsee enlighten this poor lost dude."

She covered her speech / digestive / breathing apparatus with a pitifully inadequate hand. "Excuse me," she said. "But whoever taught you Standard English was a real prick."

"Why, nay, I am negatively inclined to this thought. In point of fact, dearheart, I have never heard of a place called Prick, nor of a people of that same title. My tutor was a Vegan."

She laughed again, the lovely choking sound of it sending glinch-bumps racing down my backmost parts. "Well, whoever or whatever he was, he couldn't have been too fond of Fomisians. You've blended about four dialects and slangs."

"What nerdy gaucherie! You don't say! Egad."

"It's all right; it's not your fault."

Having thus elicited her sympathies, I further encouraged her to imbibe some of my hard-obtained beverages. She knuckled under the charm, and after a few servings she began telling of her hatred toward the Rrawgliw enemy and their vicious, nasty ways —

— Her words, not mine; please refrain from striking me again!

Anyway, soon she began boo-hooing about her husband, which annoyed me since he had long since transcended the need for reliance on physical necessity when his head intercepted the trajectory of a seeker-bullet on Kath'le. Verily did she moan about this, and reflect upon the animosity she had built up for mine noble Fomisian race before the Earth-Fomis Treaty.

"I've been wrong," this luscious lass said to me. "I guess your people aren't really any different than mine. War's the same everywhere. You must have lost people you loved, too."

Then her eye-leaking began again, and I of course was obliged to console her in the most gentlemanly manner possible. I settled myself upon the antimacassar of her chair and draped my left manipulative appendages around her shoulders.

The touch of her skin, the unnatural feel of her warmth, excited me. Again I felt the hunger.

Since the Treaty, fresh meat has been scarce. Fomis has been rationing protein, and Rrawgliw meat is not good for our metabolic functions.

— No, of course we never seriously considered such a thing.

Well: a human female, unarmed, in my locked, private, paid-for pad; the perfectly natural desire I felt for her — I confess the situation took command of me.

The pre-Treaty days had taught me much: I hit her in a human vital part below the frail ribcage. She bent over and gasped for breath, but as I advanced for the *coup de main* she opened up with another of those skull-splitters, a wail to shake the furniture and give bad karma by wilting the room flora. I had to stop this or else the constabulary would soon arrive.

So: double manipulator thrust followed with a strike to the meat-covered jaw, and that tender body landed unconscious with a final, blissful thud.

Alas, before I could feast more than my eyes and descend for the *piece de resistance*, the local custodians of law and order burst into my sanctum sanctorum-like, seized my person, violated my diplomatic immunity by applying their shocksticks despite my cries of porcine brutality, and trundled me off.

It was not long before I was tried, sentenced, and sent to the Front — where at first opportunity I allowed myself to be captured by your Rrawgliw selves to provide my invaluable services, having realized the error of my previous ways.

Oh, noble sirs, I implore you — forgive my people their transgressions; they were made in ignorance, under economic duress! I'm sure if we parleyed we could transfer allegiances.

Which way to the Front?



Aborigines

(Continued from page 27)

and planetarium artist, says science fiction illustrating is something he's wanted to do since he was a little kid. "Getting a manuscript in the mail that no one has read is great," he says.

"True Allegiance," by **Steven R. Boyett**, is another humorous story from the man who brought us "Minutes of the Last Meeting at Olduvai" in the Nov.-Dec. 1987 issue.

Boyett says he pictures the Fomisian alien in "True Allegiance" speaking in a voice like Bullwinkle's.



Stephen R. Boyett

I had to ask Boyett, who is single, if he identifies with the male-on-the-make that he parodies so well.

"There is a dichotomy," he told me. "One the one hand I think, 'Oh God, I'm one of these,' and on the other hand, I was disgusted whenever I saw this."

Boyett is a full-time writer with several novels under his belt and two short stories coming out in anthologies soon, "The Answer Tree" in *Silver Screams*, to be edited by **David J. Schow**, and "Like Pavlov's Dogs" in *Book of the Dead*, edited by **John Skipp** and **Craig Spector**. He's also finishing up a "mainstream, (though still weird) novel" called *Screams in the Wreckage*.

"True Allegiance" is il-



Langs of a feather

lustrated by **Charles Lang**, a frequent artist contributor who illustrated "Cat Scratch" by **Emily Devenport** in the Sept.-Oct. 1988 issue.

When I spoke to Charles, he and his artist wife **Wendy Snow-Lang** were about to leave for the Necon in Rhode Island, a horror convention where they were to be artist guests of honor.

They both attended the Horror Writers of America banquet in New York in June, which was "a blast" according to Charles.

He is continuing his illustrations for horror novels, the latest being **Graham Masterton's Wells of Hell** for Tor Books.

Charles and Wendy just got a kitten named Billy after not having a cat for three years. I thought this addition to the family was a bit unusual, since they have several birds, including one "small but feisty" conure.

Charles says of the cat and the bird: "Neither one has killed the other, but I have friends who are placing bets."

Wendy, whose last illustration for *Aboriginal* was "Skin Deep" by **Emily Devenport** in the Sept.-Oct. 1987 issue, illustrates "Goodness," by **Robert Reed**, in this issue.

Wendy is spending more of her time writing these days, cutting back on the number of paintings she prepares to exhibit at SF conventions.

Even though her schooling is in art, she finds her writing "more satisfying lately." When I spoke to her she was finishing up

a vampire novel.

Robert Reed's "Goodness" takes a look at culture clash in suburbia. He also authored "Aeries" in the Sept.-Oct. 1987 issue.

Reed has a new science fiction novel coming out next spring called *Black Milk* (Donald I. Fine). He also recently sold a story to the *Synergy 4* anthology, which is being edited by **George Zebrowski** (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).

Reed says he just ran a marathon in his hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska, and, despite having a sore hamstring, he broke his personal best time.



Robert Reed

Seeking information that would confirm or deny my preconceptions about long-distance runners, I asked Reed if he was a masochist. He said, no, he doesn't like pain and tries to

avoid it. Furthermore, the look of agony one sees on runner's faces is usually exhaustion more than anything else, he says.

Charlotte Snowden Bridges brings us the amusing poem "Suppertime in Sagittarius."

Bridges is a computer analyst. She is also a completely dedicated Harlan Ellison fan, so it's a fitting coincidence that her work appears in this issue along with Ellison's.

Bridges readily admits that

was recently the topic of an article in the *Anchorage Daily News*.

This poem is her second professional sale. She received only \$2 for the first one, so things are improving.

She says she is working on a science fiction short story that "I dreamed with unusual clarity and detail."

Scott Green makes his debut in *Aboriginal* with the poem "Mars Still Beckons."

Green, who sold his first poem to *Amazing Stories* in 1982, has poems forthcoming in *Trajectories* and *Haunts* and a story coming out in *Tales of the Unanticipated*.

He makes his living writing articles for business publications and local newspapers, and he's been bitten by the political bug.

Green is currently in his second term in the New Hampshire House of Representatives as a

Republican from Manchester. As a legislator, he receives \$100 a term plus mileage expenses.

He lists his hobbies as politics, extremely wealthy unmarried women, and uncontested elections. Alas, this fall he will have to face an opponent in the primary who registered at the last minute.

In other *Aboriginal* news **Dean Whitlock**, who wrote "Containment" in the Feb.-March 1987 issue, says his story "The Million Dollar Wound," which appeared in *Fantasy and Science Fiction Magazine* in Jan. 1987, will be included in **Gardner Dozois'** *Year's Best Science Fiction, Fifth Annual Edition*, published this year by St. Martin's Press.

"Containment" was picked to appear in the recent *Aboriginal* anthology, so that makes two for Whitlock in one year. "It's a heady feeling," he says. □



Charlotte Snowden Bridges

"after 25 years of adoration, I have given Harlan Ellison deity status in my life."

Besides Ellison and her 11-year-old daughter, Bridges' greatest passion is "the exchange of intellectual ideas, life experiences and dreams through the art



Scott E. Green

of letter writing." Sounds like a good skill to have when you live in Anchorage, Alaska. Her hobby

Mars Still Beckons

By Scott E. Green

*Helium fell
when the first pictures
came over
the JPL monitors and
no brave rebel captain
waved in front of it
to greet his kin
in Africa
and Pellucidar.
The War Between the Worlds,
did not start
No cool great intellect
played its heat ray
across the camera lens
to hide imperialistic plots from
Cronkite and Brokaw.
There wasn't even
an Illinois town
of green lawns and
carnival goes
camouflaging
hearts of alien passions
from the voyeur eyes of Earth.
There only remained
Mars — Mars still beckons.*

Goodness

(Continued from page 34)

shivered and said, "Tentacles and wings and things. Icky-poo! I'd rather have you playing with a wormy dog than one of them. I mean it!"

One summer the people up the street moved away. They left their tiny swimming pool filled with water, and Guss found a way through the high wooden fence. No one would be watching. "We go in at night," he said. "Okay? Wear your swimsuit for underwear, and we'll meet at nine."

It was frightening in a fun way, and Curtis spent every minute believing he was just about to be caught. He made no noise whatsoever, swimming lazy breaststroke laps and diving to the concrete bottom. It was a dark night, and he couldn't see anyone who wasn't right beside him. But he heard Guss hooting and splashing, even jumping off the stubby board and trying to scare Barney. In all circumstances, fearless Guss enjoyed himself, and he seemed to beg the world to catch him.

Not Curtis.

The guilt worked on him, making his belly sick and his nerves frazzled. Curtis was practically relieved when he came up from a long dive and saw a flashlight sweeping this way and that. Suddenly no one else was splashing. Barney took a labored breath and pulled himself underwater. Curtis heard his father's voice, then Mother shouted, "There! What's that?" the beam found his face, the light cutting through his eyes and banging around his head until he was blinded.

Blinking and feeling sick, he swam towards the edge. Mother said, "What are you doing here? Are you crazy? This isn't your house. This isn't your pool. This is not your water, young man! You're lucky we're not the police."

Curtis wondered what she would do if he drowned now. Right here. He pictured his mother crying over his limp, lifeless body. Then he pulled himself up on the concrete deck.

Barney surfaced behind him, then Guss. He could hear them splashing and gasping. "All of you!" shouted Mother. "I want you out this minute. This minute! And I mean now!"

Then it seemed like a great moment, in a backwards way. The hot shrillness of that voice and both of his friends leaping to attention ... well, suddenly all of Curtis's fears and obediences were vindicated. In one neat stroke, he thought, everyone would learn the terrors which he had grown up with. "I believe this from you, Guss. But Barney? I always thought you were a good, decent boy!"

Barney made a low moaning sound, then sobbed.

And Mother said, "And you too. Whoever you are!"

But this is all of us, thought Curtis. Who else is there?

"I see you, young man. I see you."

Curtis felt dead inside. Doomed. He watched Mother pointing the flashlight at the far end of the pool, and he caught a glimpse of a fishy shape with

jeweled eyes and thick fins and big gills working hard. She moaned, "Oh sweet Jesus," and dropped the flashlight. It hit the deck and rolled into the water, its beam spinning as it sank. The alien swam and picked it up with its mouth. Then it put the flashlight on the deck, saying, "You're welcome," in a satirical way.

Mother screamed.

Father retrieved the light.

Mother said, "Your clothes! Get your clothes on! We're leaving!" Curtis hadn't seen the alien, and he guessed no one else had either. But would she believe him? "You think you're so smart," she told him while they marched home. "But you're not. You'll see, young man. It'll be a long, long time before you're cutting around again. Let me tell you."

Curtis felt guilty. He hadn't known there was an alien with them, but still he put the blame on himself.

"I'm not having my child cavorting with monsters," she told the world. "Not now. Not ever. Do you understand me? Do you? Do you?"

*** * * * *

Guss was the first of them to get his license. That night he had his dad's car and the three of them went out for tacos and shakes. It was a glorious adventure. Every ordinary function felt full of promise. They came out of the drive-in, belching and ready for the world, and a four-armed alien emerged from some shadows. It was wearing clean jeans and a T-shirt that said COLORADO. The face was very nearly human, and it had breasts of some kind or another. But there was no knowing gender. Aliens didn't talk about such things. "Can I ride with you guys? Huh?" It had a friendly voice and smile. "Wherever you're going. It doesn't matter."

"Why not?" said Guss. "Hop in the back with old Barn!"

Curtis rode in front, saying nothing but feeling ill-at-ease. Guss drove as if he'd been driving for years. "Any place special you want to go?" he asked. It was a question for everyone. "How about you, Curt? What've you got in mind?"

His folks were having a party tonight. There was absolutely no chance of him being seen by Mother, and yet

He breathed and said, "I don't know. I feel a little funny. Maybe the flu or something."

"Kind of sudden, huh?" Guss kept watching him.

"Flu does that. It's quick."

Guss looked in his mirror and said, "Read my mind, Barn."

Barney said in a slow, precise voice, "One cowardly shit."

"Listen," the alien interjected. "If I'm causing trouble, why don't you just drop me off. Just anywhere."

"No, that's okay." Guss was angry. He said, "It's old Curt's choice and he's got no choice. We'll drop him at home and then take the tour of the town. The three of us."

No one spoke for a few minutes.

Then the alien asked Barney about school. Aliens were terribly good at light conversation; and since they never spoke about themselves, they were terrific listeners.



Barney talked about classes and teachers. He seemed happy for the chance to be giving his opinions.

Curtis's driveway was full of cars, and cars filled the street. The house was bathed in a carefree atmosphere. Curtis climbed out and Barney volunteered to sit in the front seat. "We've got a guest, remember?" Guss was in a foul mood. He gripped the wheel with both hands and stared out straight ahead.

The alien sat beside Guss. Curtis told everyone good night and saw them drive off, Barney waving with one hand and the alien waving with three. Then he went inside. The living room was crowded with liquor-sodden adults telling rude stories. Mother saw Curtis, and she came to him and said, "My, you're home early."

"My stomach hurts," he explained. There was something of the truth in that answer. "I'll go upstairs," he volunteered, "and watch TV or something."

"Why don't you?" she said. Mother had been drinking, which was odd to see. She must have realized that she looked a little drunk. She was embarrassed and standoffish, telling him, "We'll be late, darling. So you just go upstairs and rest."

He lay on the bed, still dressed, the TV on but his mind wandering. Curtis found himself thinking about all the ways his folks had been right over the years. What was smart to do; what was stupid. What brings success; what courts failure. He didn't think about aliens in particular, but they were never far from things. He wished he could be like Guss, only on second thought he realized that he didn't admire Guss. Except for his recklessness, that is. So he wondered if he could live like Barney, paying lip-service to the rules and then moving with the currents. Only that seemed like a false, hypocritical way of doing things. The only answer was to stick to his guns. No excuses. Curtis found himself full of a new courage. No excuses ... it would be his motto from now on. He made a vow to himself.

The living room was quiet. Was the party done?

Curtis crept downstairs and heard sounds from the backyard. No one was in the kitchen. He got an apple from the refrigerator and washed it in the sink, looking into the back and hearing a radio playing, the music crackling from a tiny speaker. People were standing on the patio, talking and drinking and laughing as if everything in the world was funny. Some of them were pointing to something farther out. Curtis squinted. He couldn't see anything at all. So he turned off the kitchen lights and pressed his face to the glass. That's when he saw them. The alien was nearly eight feet tall, thin, and sporting a long muscular trunk. The trunk lay across Mother's back, and she held onto its waist and pressed her face into its long chest, and their feet drifted over the matted grass to the sputtering strains of Brahms. □

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Editor's Notes

(Continued from page 6)

We doubt it.

Not all editors and publishers are corporate sharks. The ones who aren't are a seriously endangered species, but even they rarely have control over the art director or marketing department.

At *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, we pick stories because we like them and think you'll like them. We don't expect to please all of the people all of the time. We aren't interested in momentary trends — we leave those to the artistic followers of the late Andy Warhol.

We want our artists to read the stories and become inspired. We want their best work, not a mechanical, pre-formatted formula output.

Sometimes the art we get isn't quite what we hoped it would be, but that's life. Taking a risk means taking a chance you'll lose in order to win a bigger prize — in our case, inspired art.

The scientific method has created a miraculous age in which to live. But science has not come so far that we can define taste or art by formula. Even using scientific methods, polls have very limited accuracy.

And what New York publishers apparently fail to understand is that their studies only apply to the past. When asked about their reading tastes, most people will recall something they just finished reading that they liked. It doesn't mean they will like a pale imitation.

Those who think their job is to just print the equivalent of money should probably leave the publishing jobs in New York and apply for work with the U.S. Mint and do just that. Then the ends and the means will be a little more in sync.

You didn't miss one

As we grow, it has become necessary to farm out some of the work we used to do in-house. Sometimes this causes complications. For instance, our switch

from in-house subscription list maintenance to sending it to an outside shop resulted in a three-week delay in getting out issue No. 11 — the Sept.-Nov. issue. We apologize for the delay. The magazines had to sit in our printer's warehouse for three weeks waiting for the labels.

There was no July-August issue! As we mentioned in issue No. 10, we skipped that date to get *Aboriginal* converted to the same lead time used by other magazine publishers.

Alien Publisher

(Continued from page 7)

have seen, the increasing triviality of the distinction requires a strengthening of one's commitment to it. As the American and Soviet human beings come to resemble each other, they become more rabid in their abhorrence of each other. Eventually, the clearest remaining difference between the two countries will be the presence of the Shopping Channel, and a war of annihilation will be imminent.

But they have some time yet. Before the human beings play out the answer to the big one, they must answer all the little ones. In the United States, they have institutionalized the dialectic in a harmless pursuit called presidential politics. Every four years, the American nation, dissatisfied with the quiescence of professional wrestling, turns itself upside down in a search for the population's two most mediocre politicians. These two men (and they are always men) are then imprisoned in a kind of carnival for as much as four months, while their fellows insult and ridicule them and they accuse each other of wanting to either increase taxes or reduce defense expenditures. Or is it the other way around? I am sorry to be so imprecise, but it is difficult to sort it out. The real questions facing humanity: whether to go into space, the viability of the planet's ecosystem, the control of and responsibility for the means

Even though we announced it in our May-June issue, we still got letters from folks wondering where their "July" issue was.

Sigh.

We believe the problems encountered by the outside computer house have been resolved, so you should receive this issue on time, around the middle to end of September, depending on how fast your local letter carrier is.

Next issue maybe the topic will be perfection — talk about myths... □

of production, property rights in information, are pointedly ignored.

At the end of the four months, the rest of the adult population is given the opportunity to vote for the mediocrity most lacking in integrity. The one with the most votes loses and is forced to assume the worst occupation humanity has to offer, the American presidency, "CEO of the free world." Believe me, the contest is every bit as ridiculous as it sounds, and although it has been going on for two hundred years, its sponsors have not yet been able to get more than half the adult population to participate by casting a vote for one mediocrity or the other.

But then they realize it is a choice between garnet red and metallic gray. □



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